Arvind Sharma

A Primal Perspective on the Philosophy of Religion

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Ines Talamantez

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PREFACE

What am I trying to accomplish through the exercise which I have undertaken, namely, to examine the philosophy of religion in the light of primal religions?

If to choose someone else's expression to characterize one's own intellectual endeavour is an indication of one's own lack of imagination, then I must plead guilty to that charge; but not to that of lack of gratitude, for I have to thank Robin Horton for describing, better than I can, what I have attempted in the book. It is an exercise in what he calls "translational understanding." I quote him now:

> By 'translational understanding', I mean the kind of understanding of a particular thought-system that results from the successful translation of the language and conceptual system that embody it into terms of a language and conceptual system that currently enjoy 'world' status. In talking of translation, of course, I am not just talking of the provision of dictionary equivalents for individual words or sentences. I am talking about finding a 'world-language' equivalent for a whole realm of discourse, and of showing, in 'world-language' terms, what the point of that realm of discourse is in the life of the people who use it. Translation, in this broader sense, can be very arduous. There may be no realm of discourse in the 'world' language that exactly fits the bill. We may have to bend and refashion existing realms, and even redefine their guiding intentions. We may have to recombine realms that have become separated during the evolution of the modern condition. Arduous though it may be, however, this operation is the vital preliminary to any further interpretative steps.[1]

I think the reader will agree that the philosophy of religion enjoys world status. I think the reader will also agree that primal thought has yet to acquire that status, although thanks to the efforts of some people cited in the book, it might well already be on its way to doing so. This book attempts to incorporate the primal religious experience within the categories employed in the modern philosophy of religion discourse, irrespective of whether such categories or notions are found within the primal religions themselves. The attempt is not without its peril. If one is unsuccessful, the understanding gets aborted in what has been described as a form of cognitive amniocentesis. However, if one is successful, one might even be so fortunate as to detect a family resemblance and thus enlarge one's circle of intellectual acquaintance.

I know very little of philosophy and even less of primal religions but I have persevered in the very Hindu hope that perhaps the clash of two ignorances might ignite the spark of knowledge. In any case primal religion, in a formal sense, is not my religion and the philosophy of religion as a world language, in Robin Horton's sense, is not my native philosophy, but I do tend to concur with him when he says that

> There is nothing mysterious in all of this about the role of a 'world' language and its associated conceptual system. The 'world' status simply reflects present-day demographic and political realities. And these may of course change drastically in the future. Nonetheless, they are the realities of today, and they do provide the *raison d'être* of this kind of translation. In the first place, given these realities, such translation is the most economic means of bringing the characteristics of a particular thought-system to the attention of a world-wide audience. Secondly, without prior translation of all the various thought-systems of the world into terms of a common language and conceptual apparatus, there can be no comparison of such thought-systems with respect to their differences and similarities. And once again, given current realities, a 'world' language would seem to be the best means of making this comparative exercise accessible to a world-wide audience.[2]

These too are my reasons for attempting what I have tried to accomplish in this book.

Primal religions, however, pose a special problem in this respect. Translational understanding, as it has been carried out in the philosophy of religion, has typically meant the rendering of the philosophical ideas of one religion or culture into that of another. Typically these ideas have a textual source and the fact that they exist in the form of written texts often means that an attempt has been made to at least present them systematically, if not to build them into a system of their own. Let us describe this state of affairs as one of *explicit philosophy*. Then, in the case of primal religions, given the absence of such linguistic texts, we face a state of affairs for which the expression *implicit philosophy* might be appropriate. I mention this to put ourselves on guard against an error, which Charles Taylor warns us, "we easily fall victim to. We could conclude from the fact that some people operate without a philosophically defined framework [linguistically] that they are quite without a framework at all. And that might be totally untrue (indeed, I want to claim, always is untrue)."[3]

I have therefore dared to set alongside religions, which value scriptures, primal religions which even boast that their religion is written, in the words of John Mbiti, "not on paper but in people's hearts."[4]

I hope that what is accomplished in the course of my desire to place, in this sense, strange bedfellows in fertile apposition, will not be judged indecent, and certainly, dare I hope, not obscene.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT ARE PRIMAL RELIGIONS?

Primal: A Word About the Word

The decision to use of the word "primal," to denote the body of doctrines and practices denoted by it for the purposes of this book was taken consciously. The whole issue, therefore, needs to be raised to the level of academic awareness.

Several other terms could have been employed: (1) primitive, (2) tribal, (3) small-scale, (4) indigenous, (5) folk, (6) native, (7) aboriginal; (8) oral; (9) shamanistic and (10) archaic.[1] In fact, to a certain extent, these terms have and can be used interchangeably,[2] although they vary in their semantic orientation. The usage in the field is far from settled. For instance, if one consults the index of *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987) for the term 'primal,' one is led to the term 'primitive.' The term '*primitive*,' however, has not quite shed its association with something not fully developed (whether viewed negatively or positively). But the religious communities one is dealing with "have just as long a history as our own, and while they are less developed than our society in some respects they are often more developed in others."[3] The word *tribal* serves to draw attention to the form of social organization often associated with primal religions, but its close association with totemism in the literature may be a reason for using it with caution in our context.[4] The word *small scale* is so very anthropological in its very conception that it seems to obscure the fact of the global spread of such societies.[5] The term *indigenous* has been rendered equivocal by the spread of missionary religions. Thus Hinduism and Shinto are often referred to as the indigenous religious traditions of India and Japan respectively,[6] but in a way which excludes them from the purview of primal religions in their current usage. The word *folk* is useful, as it points to the overlap that might occur between primal religions and other religious traditions, but since it is used typically to identify folk elements within existing religious traditions,

the use tends to become parasitic on these other traditions.[7] It may, therefore, be passed up in favour of some other term which is not. *Native* might be one such term, although it too is contrapuntal to the non-native. However, the term is as often used as an adjective as a substantive, as in the expression 'native American', which inhibits its induction into general discourse. *Aboriginal* takes care of this objection, but attracts another: it is applied more frequently to the Australian reality than elsewhere.[8] As for *oral*, certain other world religions, such as Hinduism, have a primary oral orientation as well, if one thinks of the oral transmission of the Vedic and some other disciplic traditions within it. Finally, primal religions are inclusive of *shamanism* but not confined to it.

The term *archaic* requires a paragraph on its own. The word has been used in different ways. Robert Bellah uses it to designate one of the five stages of religious evolution, the second. The first he calls primitive, and the three stages which succeed archaic are labelled "historic," "early modern," and "modern." Robert Bellah himself remarks, however, that he has used the term "primitive religion in an unusually restricted sense. Much of what is usually classified as primitive religion will fall in my second category, archaic religion, which includes the religious systems of much of Africa and Polynesia and some of the New World, as well as the earliest religious systems of the ancient Middle East, India and China."[9] This distinction does not apply to our discussion.

Another distinction which does not apply to our discussion is the one that might be made between the "archaic" religions and civilizations of Maya in northern Guatemala (c. 300-900 CE); Inca in Peru (comprising cultures which flourished from c. 800 BCE - 1400 CE) and Aztec in the valley of Mexico, between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries CE;[10] and the primal religions. Primal religions differ from these "archaic" religions as radically as the living from the dead. The striking feature of the primal religions is that they have survived, in whatever condition, the "onslaught of genocidal colonization, conversion pressures from global religions, mechanistic materialism and destruction of their natural environments by the global economy of limitless consumption,"[11] so that their followers now "comprise at least four percent of the world population."[12] The "archaic" religions cited earlier did not survive this onslaught the way primal religions did. There is, however, one point of convergence. The survivors and survivals of the pre-Columbian civilizations and religions are sometimes included in the treatment of primal religions.[13]

This leads to the consideration of a third, and the most significant, point in this connection. The material yielded by prehistoric archeology is often associated with 'archaic cultures', through what has been called the theory of 'survivals' – "the principle that one may proceed by making an equation

between the primeval savage and modern 'primitive' peoples, and by using information derived from the latter to illustrate life and beliefs of the former."[14] It is on the basis of this theory of survivals that Joseph M. Kitagawa can make the following claim: "by piecing together evidence from archaeology, physical anthropology, philology, and other sources, we conjecture that all activities directed toward subsistence and all cultic and religious activities merged to form a single, unified community. Some scholars even speculate that the archaic tribal community was, so to speak, a 'religious universe' in which living itself was a religious act,"[15] as is often claimed to be the case with primal religions. In this case then the category of primal religions includes *such* archaic religions.[16]

More Words

Although we tried to spread the net as wide as possible in the previous section, a few verbal fish escaped this lexical net, as we shall now discover. The following terms have also been used for the realm of discourse we have chosen to refer to by the term primal religions: (1) non-literate[17]; (2) autochthonous[18]; (3) chthonic[19]; (4) ethnic[20]; (5) small religions[21]; (6) local religions[22]; (7) pre-Axial religions[23] and (8) ethnographic societies[24].

The word *non-literate* would be a strong contender, but for the fact that what it gains in accuracy it loses in respectability. Not everyone is literate enough to draw a clear distinction between non-literate and illiterate, just as not all scholars are so sophisticated as to distinguish between the non-rational and the irrational in relation to religion. *Autochthonous* helps to emphasize the self-standing nature of primal religions but is a mouthful. *Chthonic* is shorter but also more esoteric. *Ethnic* is the word which refers to the primal in the expression "ethnic units" as employed in Spanish and Portuguese, and its scholarly standing is reflected by its use as the title of the well-known journal, *Ethnos*. The word ethnic has, however, with the rise of ethnic studies in the English-speaking world, mutated itself to mean something somewhat different in English, when compared with its Spanish and Portuguese sense. The expression *small religions* is an English translation of the German *kleine Religionen*. Unfortunately the word small in English is an antonym not only of large but also great and one would not like to minimize the significance of the very enterprise one is undertaking on account of a semantic ambiguity. *Local religions* is another possibility, but is difficult to move from the realm of possibility to prospect, on account of its various other associations, not excluding the municipal. Some scholars have used the expression *pre-Axial religions*, by drawing on a distinction between the Axial Age and the Pre-Axial period made popular by Karl Jaspers. It, however, unfortunately obscures the fact that many primal religions have

survived beyond the Axial Age. One more intriguing term and we are done. This is the societal description of primal religions as *ethnographic societies*. The description contains an important nugget of insight which will be developed later, namely, that the nature and size of the community is an important diagnostic feature of primal religions. However, to the extent that prehistoric manifestations of primal religions are usually included in the discussion of primal religions, but did not have the benefit of ethnographers, creates a problem. The expression is, however, a good example of a stipulative definition, and, although obviously circular, it at least avoids tautological vacuousness.

In the end, then, our rehearsal of various terms in this section, as well as in the previous one, is accompanied by reservation in relation to each and we decide to call what we are going to study "primal religions." If even this choice still seems somewhat arbitrary, we hope it is not unfair.

So What are Primal Religions?

The most fruitful way of indicating what primal religions are about is perhaps to adopt a communitarian approach towards them. Indeed, what is often said to be distinctive of them is their sense of community. The fourfold typology of religious communities, identified by Joseph Kitagawa, holds promise from this point of view. According to him, "for students of religion, the category religious community must include at least (1) tribal communities, both natural and religious, archaic and contemporary, (2) sacred national communities, (3) founded religious communities such as the Buddhist, the Christian and the Islamic, and (4) various religious societies-turned-communities, as for instance orders of monks and nuns."[25] If one lets the last category fall off the radar screen, one discovers that all the world's religions could be correlated to the first three categories. The founded religious communities would then include not only the Buddhist, Christian and Islamic communities but also the "lesser known but equally significant," Jaina, Zoroastrian and Manichean communities as also the "founded religious communities of recent origin, such as the Sikh, Baha'i, Mormon, and a number of contemporary religious movements in Asia, Africa and the Americas." Similarly, the category of sacred national community could include the Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Hebrew types of communities, to which the examples of Tibet, Japan and perhaps India could be added, as also that of China, especially if the category is taken to include not just the community but "the idea of the sacred national community"[26] as well.

The reader will realize, on consulting virtually any book on world religions, that these two categories account for virtually all of the world's religions *except one*, namely, primal religions. These are the religious beliefs

and practices found in "the contemporary tribal or folk communities scattered throughout Africa, Asia, Oceania, Australia, and the Americas [which] display a great divergence in complexity of community structure, division of labor, cultic and religious beliefs and practices, and relations with neighboring societies and cultures."[27] However,

> Different though they are in many respects, contemporary tribal communities share one characteristic: they are held together, to quote Robert Redfield, "by common understanding as to the ultimate nature and purpose of life." Each community "exists not so much in the exchange of useful functions as in the common understandings as to the ends given." To these communities, life's ultimate purpose is the creation of a meaningful order through imitation of the celestial model, transmitted by myths and celebrated in rituals.[28]

What is Philosophy of Religion?

There are two basic ways in which a thing may be defined: either by way of stating what it is in itself or by stating wherein it differs from others. Thus when someone who is new in town inquires about an address he or she needs to go to, the person giving the directions may either describe the building indicated by the address as it is in itself (it is the *tallest* building in the street) or in relation to something else (it is *next* to the tallest building in the street).

One can avoid much philosophical fanfare by defining the philosophy of religion similarly. If philosophy constitutes rational investigation into the nature of reality, then the philosophy of religion consists of such investigation directed at the phenomenon called religion and represents the body of knowledge which has been generated as a result of this exercise. This is one way of defining the philosophy of religion in and by itself, or, as John Hick puts it, philosophy of religion represents "philosophical thinking about religion."[29]

Philosophy of religion can also be defined by distinguishing it from adjacent areas of inquiry. One of these is theology, which is typically the rational elaboration of the belief-system rather than a rational investigation into its truth or otherwise as such. At one time the term philosophy of religion was even generally "understood to mean religious philosophizing in the sense of the philosophical defense of religious convictions. It was seen as continuing the work of 'natural,' distinguished from 'revealed' theology." But as John Hick suggests "it seems better to call this endeavour 'natural theology' and to term the wider philosophical defense of religious beliefs 'apologetics.'"[30]

Philosophy of religion has to do with religion but it is obviously itself not a religion. It is, of course, "related to the [religious realm] as, for example,

the philosophy of law is related to the realm of legal phenomenon and to juridical concepts and modes of reasoning, the philosophy of art to artistic phenomena and to the categories and methods of aesthetic discussion."[31]

Do Primal Religions Possess a Philosophy?

We now have to clarify two basic (mis)conceptions in order to create the intellectual space for this book: (1) that the primal religions have no philosophy and (2) that primal religions do not qualify as religions.

The view that primal religions do not possess philosophy is closely associated with another feature associated with them – that they belong to nonliterate cultures and "to speak of the philosophy of cultures that had no literature may seem inappropriate."[32] Geoffrey Parrinder indicates the limitation of this line of reasoning by pointing out that the foundational scriptures of Hinduism were transmitted orally for centuries, although considered among the "oldest scriptures" of the world.[33] Hence one should not equate literacy with philosophy. The point is helpful but has its limits, for the Hindus did have a vast body of sacred literature we may oxymoronically label "scripture," whereas, according to John S. Mbiti, "one of the difficulties in studying African religions and philosophy is that there are no sacred scriptures."[34] Elsewhere he makes the more general statement that "there are no sacred writings in traditional societies."[35] Allied to this is the view that not only do primal cultures lack literacy, and not only are they without any body of substantial lore which might, through the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, be called "literature"[36] or scripture but (strike three) they possess no "system of thought."[37]

Although these three features seem to flow out of and into one another as it were, they do not necessarily entail each other. Thus a nonliterate culture could possess a body of compositions transmitted *orally*,[38] which would function as literature without possessing a Western form or conforming to a Western norm; similarly, a society could choose *not* to express its ideas in words but, rather, in other ways. As Geoffrey Parrinder observes regarding Africa: "If there were no scriptures, however, there is a great deal of artistic expression, which is the indigenous language of African belief and thought. Neglected and despised for long, African art has been appreciated in this century all over the world. This is Africa's own visible and tangible self-expression, and a great deal of it is concerned with religion."[39] Elsewhere he adds: "Knowledge of religion therefore throws light upon the interpretation of art, and art illuminates the religion. Hence it can be claimed that African art provides a kind of scripture of African religion, for it is its expression from within."[40] Noel Q. King proposes that rituals could also serve as texts.[41] Perhaps it is best to conclude this section with the following reflection, and by extending its application to all primal religions.

> To say that African peoples have no systems of thought, explicit or assumed, would be to deny their humanity. The great philosophical phrase, "I think therefore I am," applies to all men. Some students of African life watch rituals, photograph masquerades, or dissect social organization and then declare that Africans have no doctrines and that their religion is "not thought out but danced out." That fatuous statement came in fact from an armchair theorist, but it suggests that human beings dance for no reason and with their minds literally blank. But why are dances performed and repeated? There are many reasons, and powerful ones are that they express the life force, continuity with the past, and unity in the present community, and these are reasonable ideas.[42]

Do Primal Religions Qualify as Religion?

The question needs to be clarified first. The application of the term religion to primal religions may be difficult to justify under some definitions of religion, such as the following found in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. Religion is defined therein as the "human recognition of superhuman controlling power and especially of a personal God or Gods entitled to obedience and worship."[43]

The issue however surfaces in the present context in a slightly different way. It does so in the form of two questions: (1) how does one distinguish religion from magic and (2) do primal religions possess a soteriology like the so-called world religions do?

These questions, especially the latter, will be examined in more detail later in the chapter, so they need not detain us here. However, a brief comment regarding the first point is in order here. As Charles Long notes:

> To take account of the great mass of data in these cultures a more comprehensive definition of religion is also needed. Such a definition is suggested by E. Crawley in *The Tree of Life* where he points out that "neither the Greek nor the Latin language has any comprehensive term for religion, except in the one *hiero* and in the other *sacra*, words which are equivalent to 'sacred.' No other term covers the whole of religious phenomena, and [no] other conception will comprise the whole body of religious facts. And important consequence of thus giving the study of primitive religion the wide scope of comparative hierophany is that magic can longer must be divorced from religion, since the sacred will now be found coextensive with the magico-religious.[44]

Can the Study of Primal Religions make a Contribution to the Philosophy of Religion?

I

It seems to be a tacit assumption in the study of religion that the study of primal religions has little to contribute to the philosophy of religion. We wish to question this assumption. In fact we wish to go even further. We wish to suggest that in fact there might be strong grounds for reversing the assumption: That in fact the study of primal religion may have much to offer to the philosophy of religion.

II

One might begin by asking: How did this assumption arise? An obvious answer seems to lie in the equation of philosophy with literacy – in the belief that only literate cultures can possibly develop a philosophy. The association of primal religions with pre-literate or non-literate societies may thus, at least in part, account for the current assumption. The fact that the early phase of the academic study of religion, the diffusionists notwithstanding, was dominated by the doctrine of evolution, may also have a vestigial role to play in the persistence of this attitude. For the Anthropological School, represented by E.B. Tylor, R.R. Marett and George Frazer, the 'primitive man' was in the end a 'rudimentary' rationalist; for the Sociological School, as represented by Comte and Durkheim he was still trapped in the mythological or metaphysical stages of human development which preceded the emergence of the scientific age and for the Psychological School, as represented by Freud, still in his childhood groping for a father-figure. Hence in virtually every method, as it emerged in the study of religion, the Historical not excluded, primal religions and its adherents became associated with a mentality which could hardly be associated with the intellectual sophistication required by philosophy.

Ironically, the situation did not improve when the evolutionary schema was questioned and turned on its head. When Andrew Lang and Father W. Schmidt made a cogent case for an ur-monotheism, then the primal religions came to represent its degeneration! That again militated against any possibility of a philosophical contribution emerging from the primal religions. Hence contra-developments did not prove to be of much help in this respect, while mainline developments in the study of religion seemed to compound the problem, when Lucien Lévy-Bruhl propounded his theory of primitive mentality. Whereas primal religions had earlier flunked the E.Q. Test (Evolution Quotient Test), now they flunked the I.Q. Test (The

Intelligence Quotient Test). Not that they did not possess intelligence, they did not possess the *kind* of intelligence required for philosophising. The theory was no doubt later retracted but the retraction, that the primal religions were not pre-logical but operated with a different kind of logic, still left the outcome questionable. Developments in the study of religion, therefore, were hardly conducive to generating the possibility that primal religions could make a contribution to the philosophy of religion.

The situation has begun to change in our times with the recognition of primal religions as religious traditions in their own right. With the enfranchisement of primal religions as religions per se, dramatically illustrated by the fact that a separate chapter is devoted to them in the 1992 revised edition of Huston Smiths earlier work *The Religions of Man*, when it appeared under the new title: *The World's Religions*, one would now expect that the philosophy of religion, to justify its description, would also begin to engage material provided by the primal religions in its deliberations.

To a certain extent this process has now commenced. But it has hardly proceeded beyond the stage of using material from primal religions as *illustrative* of propositions within the philosophy of religion, rather than exerting a formative influence on their formulation itself. The present situation may be described by using two terms: *recognition* and *illustration*. Some scholars have recognized the emergence of primal religions as a factor in the philosophy of religion but remain uncertain as to how to factor them into the discussion. The word *recognition* is used to refer to this phenomenon. Other scholars have proceeded a step further and have drawn on materials from primal religions to illustrate various aspects of a modern philosophy of religion. The word *illustration* is employed to refer to this phenomenon.

The point may be elaborated with the help of appropriate examples. As the point regarding *illustration* is less contentious than the apparently innocuous but deceptive issue of recognition, it may be examined first, although this reverses the order in which they have been listed above. John F. Haught, in his book: *What is Religion? An Introduction*, seems to provide excellent examples of what I have referred to as illustration. In the following passage he connects the concept of ultimate concern, a popular concept in the philosophy of religion, with the Bear cult[45] of the Palaeolithic times. "Since hunting was a most important aspect of early human life, it is not surprising that it would be overlaid with enormous religious significance. Religion has often been expressed in terms of what makes the difference between life and death, survival and extinction, of what may be called a people's 'ultimate concern.' This is an expression used by theologian Paul Tillich to characterize religion's tendency to find something of utmost importance, that is, something that has an 'ultimate' significance for people.

And for early humans the success of the hunt was certainly a matter of ultimate concern."[46] Similarly, he does not hesitate to speak of both the totem and Jesus in the same breath, while emphasizing the inseparability of religion from symbolic consciousness:

> Ever since its palaeolithic beginnings religion has been inseparable from what we may call *symbolic consciousness*. Indeed its unique kind of symbolism is what makes it possible for us to recognize religion at any time or place, and to distinguish it from other aspects of human life and consciousness.
>
> Generally speaking, a symbol is any object, aspect of nature, event, person or expression which by pointing to one thing directly points to something else indirectly. What the symbol refers to is "beyond" the immediately or literally given object employed as the symbol. At the same time, however, the symbolized reality is also "inside" the symbol. This is because the symbol *participates* in the reality to which it points.

He then draws the well-established distinction between sign and symbol:

> Symbols should be distinguished from signs. Signs have an arbitrariness not present in symbols. For instance, a red traffic light standing for "stop" has no intrinsic connection with the act of putting on the brakes. There is no inherent reason why the color green could not have served just as well to signal the need to halt at an intersection. It is just that convention, human agreement, has decided that red will have this meaning.
>
> A symbol, on the other hand, is naturally, and not just conventionally, connected with what it stands for.

Then he goes on to say:

> The totem, for example, is a symbol and not a mere sign. It is not just an indiscriminate indicator, but an actual embodiment or sacral character of reality. In a later religious development the person of Jesus of Nazareth becomes the central religious "symbol" for Christians. Christians perceive this man not just as an arbitrary pointer to God, but as an indispensable participatory embodiment (incarnation) of the ultimate mystery that his person symbolizes.[47]

The question of *recognition* is more thorny. For instance, John Hick, in his widely used *The Philosophy of Religion*, seems reluctant to bring primal religions within the ken of the philosophy of religion. The question arises in the following context. In the first chapter of that book, after identifying the various difficulties in defining such a protean term as religion, Hick resorts to the Wittgensteinian strategy of defining it on the model of family resemblances. Then he goes on to say: "...within this ramifying set of family resemblances there is, however, one feature which is extremely widespread, even though it is not universal. This is a concern with what is variously

called salvation or liberation. This is not a feature of 'primitive religion,' which is more concerned with keeping things on an even keel, avoiding catastrophe. However, all the great developed world faiths have a soteriological (from the Greek *soteria*, salvation) structure."[48] John Hick thus identifies a structural difference between "world religions" and "primal religions." The former definitely possess a soteriological structure; its presence among the latter is at least doubtful. It is implied that on account of the absence of a soteriology, primal religions could only hope to make a very limited contribution, if any at all, to a philosophy of religion. Even such soteriology as they might possess is seen as associated with keeping things of the world in a steady state. These points must now be addressed.

Such reservations are not without foundation. For instance, a recent review of African religions offers the following assessment of its soteriological component: "Common to most African religions is the notion of the imperfect nature of the human condition. Almost every society has a creation myth that tells about the origins of human life and death. According to this myth, the first human beings were immortal; there was no suffering, sickness, or death. This situation came to an end because of an accident or act of disobedience. Whatever the cause, the myth explains why sickness, toil, suffering, and death are fundamental to human existence."[49] The account goes on to say:

> The counterpart to this idea is the notion that the problems of human life may be alleviated through ritual action. African religions are systems of explanation and control of immediate experience. They do not promise personal salvation in the afterlife or the salvation of the world at some future time. The promise of African religions is the renewal of human affairs here and now, a this-worldly form of salvation. Through ritual action misfortunes may be overcome, sicknesses removed and death put off. In general, bad situations may be changed into good ones, at least temporarily. The assumption is that human beings are largely responsible for their own misfortunes and that they also possess the ritual means to overcome them. The sources of suffering lie in people's deeds, or sins, which offend the gods and ancestors, and in the social tensions and conflicts that can cause illness. The remedy involves the consultation of a priest or priestess who discovers the sin or the social problem and prescribes the solution, for example, an offering to appease an offended deity or a ritual to settle social tensions.

The key point which is being made here seems to be that although suffering is ritually rectifiable:

> Belief in the perfectibility of human beings is not a part of African traditional religions. Instead, such religions provide the means for correcting certain social and spiritual relationships that are understood to be the causes of misfortune and suffering, even death. They assume that the traditional

> moral and social values, which the gods and ancestors uphold, are the guidelines for the good life and emphasize these rules and values in ritual performances in order to renew people's commitment to them.[50]

However, students of primitive religions have known for long, as H.B. Alexander has observed, that there are "differences in the philosophical gift among primitive races and tribes, and between individuals of savage groups, as among civilized people. The Polynesian and the American Indian are clearly more speculative than are the black tribes of Africa."[51] The Navajo, for example, possess a fully articulated soteriology.[52]

Whether a religion possesses a soteriology or not will depend in good measure on the meaning attached to the term. The word is often associated with the idea of salvation in an afterlife, perhaps on account of its Christian association. Such words, however, need to be reexamined, if not redefined, in the context of a cross-cultural philosophy of religion, bearing in mind the fact that "There is no common language, only historically particular modified languages that allow for common engagement."[53]

It might therefore be useful, at this stage, to distinguish between a this-worldly and an other-worldly soteriology. If the usage of soteriology is restricted to the other world, then even such standard concepts of salvation as the Hindu doctrine of living liberation (*jīvanmukti*) may have to be excluded from consideration, to the serious detriment of comparative philosophy.

Once the possibility of a this-worldly soteriology is conceded, two consequences ensue: (1) it becomes possible to re-examine the case of African religions for possible soteriological content, and (2) it becomes possible to apply this distinction to existing soteriologies with a view to determining whether they possess both, either or neither of these two types of soteriologies.

The ritual conservatism of African religions was alluded to earlier. However, the explanation of such conservatism in general has been seen by some scholars as possessing special religious value rather than embodying sheer cultural inertia. H.B. Alexander pointed out decades ago:

> Moral philosophy, as has been indicated, is outwardly imaged in cosmology and cosmogony; the light of heaven represents knowledge, justice, and goodness; the changeless stars represent remorseless destiny. But this outward image, just because it is beyond the control of man, becomes an object of reverence, a system of religious sanctions, rather that a problem for the will. That problem is set primarily by men's needs, especially by the great need of conforming human desire to its possible satisfactions. The recognition of this, far more than the blindness of custom and tradition, is the real source of that conservatism for which primitive people are noted; their conservative clinging to the ways of the fathers is a product not of habit, but

> of intention, whose warrant is the justification which nature gives in giving life itself.[54]

The significance of these remarks is enhanced when the African practices are compared with those prevalent in world religions. The conservatism of going to church every Sunday in Christian cultures is noteworthy in this respect, as are prayers in churches for relief in the face of natural calamities such as storms and droughts.

Both this-worldly and other-worldly soteriologies can be identified in some primal religions. S.G. Youngert, for instance, identifies the existence of both these forms in Teutonic religion, and marks the transition from the consideration of one to the other with the following remark: "Now, while salvation or deliverance thus far spoken refers, in the main, to this life, we also meet with ideas of salvation in the world to come, when that which will never die, 'judgement upon each one dead,' shall be pronounced, for that world is reached only through a Hel-way which all men have to go."[55] This corresponds to the more general pattern of cosmological speculation in primal religion:

> Cosmology is essentially an effort to define the world of space. Its natural and nearly universal first form is of a world-tent or domed house, a circular plane surmounted by a hemispherical roof. But, since the imagination does not stop with the visible, a heaven above the firmament and a hollow beneath the earth are conceived, and may be multiplied into a series of heavens and hells, thus forming a storeyed universe.[56]

Moreover, the study of primitive monotheism reveals that fact of the "withdrawal of the supreme being to remote heights, whence he presides over the large contours of life, destiny and the afterlife of the soul."[57]

In fact it is possible to go even further. One can even attempt to explain the soteriology of the world religions on the basis of models provided by the study of primal religions. In this respect, the phenomenon of the cargo cults and that of early Christianity becomes comparable. The messianic expectation and idea of a Second Coming seem to be involved in both and while the influence of the latter on the former should not be discounted, the similarity of the religious structures involved should also not be overlooked.[58]

Where does all this leave us? In a sense it brings us back to square one. The negative arguments have hopefully been accounted for. It remains to be established that the study of primal religion can, and in fact does, make a significant positive contribution to the philosophy of religion.

III

The horizons of the study of the philosophy of religion are both widened and deepened when a primal perspective is brought to bear on it. As Lawrence E.

Sullivan points out: "The appraisal of the role of indigenous spiritualities in religious life has opened or reshaped some perspectives in the study of religion...one is the nature of religion."[59]

The significance of this becomes apparent once religion is defined not in terms of soteriology but the sacred. The primal perspective enhances the philosophical appreciation of religion in at least the following significant ways at the most basic level. These points are illustrative rather than exhaustive.

(1) Philosophy of religion has so far been concerned more with the temporal than the spatial dimension of life, largely on account of its preoccupation with constellation of concepts connected with the soteriological dimension of life such as God, revelation, salvation, etc… This preoccupation has involved the neglect of the spatial dimension of religious life, although in the actual life of the believers the sacred spatial centres, as exemplified in the concept of *axis mundi*, *are no less* important. The Ka'ba is as important as Jannat to the Muslim and Jerusalem as important as Yahweh to the Jew. In fact, with the help of this insight, we would be philosophically better equipped to comprehend the attitude of those Jews who claim that, subsequent to the Holocaust, they can no longer believe in the *God* of Judaism but rather believe only in the *religion* of Judaism, especially as expressed in the state of Israel. This recognition of sacred space also enhances our understanding of 'ethnic religions,' such as Shinto.

(2) The primal perspective reinforces the need for the recognition of religion as a *universal* phenomenon "because of a philosophical understanding that humans are the same psychically and psychologically no matter what the racial background."[60] The point is not as trite as it might appear at first. The implicit distinction between primal and soteriological religions in structural terms (though not in its motive to be sure) bears a disturbing resemblance to distinctions between logical and prelogical mentalities of an earlier age. The incorporation of the primal perspective in the study of religion will reaffirm our philosophical commitment to universality.[61]

(3) The distinction between religion and magic played an important role in the study of primal religions, until it was overcome with the recognition that Otto's idea of the holy did not allow for the distinction to be maintained in the way it had been made – namely, as a part of an evolutionary scheme. However, once freed from the trammels of social Darwinism the distinction can be employed in the philosophy of religion to provide useful insights, both (a) in terms of the relation of religion to science and (b) in terms of a more sophisticated philosophical understanding of ordinary human behaviour.

The modern anthropologist, S.J. Tambiah, sees analogy at work both in science and religion. Hill develops Tambiah's point as follows:

> Science...begins with known casual relationships between phenomena and then, through analogy, discovers the identical causal relations between unknown phenomena. Meaning imbued in the magical act is [also] analogously transferred to the natural activity. This is not, Tambiah argues, faulty science but a normal activity of human thought: magic is a specialized use of analogy and the imputation of meaning from the magical procedure to a natural referent. Thus magic does what science cannot: it helps create a world of meaning. Seemingly bizarre magical behavior is to be understood as an exercise in the exploration of meaning in practical activity, not as a refutation of natural law.[62]

The last point is capable of extension to even more mundane phenomenon. We turn to Hill again for its elaboration.

> Many anthropologists would argue that magic is part of the normal daily routines of people in modern, complex societies. Clearly magic is involved when a baseball player, in order to get a hit, crosses himself or picks up a bit of dirt before batting. *Mana* is the 'charisma' of the persuasive individual; it is also the "prestige" of the person of high social station. Magical protection is afforded the automobile driver who places the statue of a saint on the dashboard. And magic is involved in the daily ritual of personal ablutions and grooming: 'I must always wear this tie with that suit', 'If my hair is not styled just so, I won't feel right.' The doctor says, 'Take two pills and call me if you don't feel better in twenty-four hours,' and we take his advice, since, like most laymen, we tend to see the science of the expert as a form of magic. And this is necessarily so, as we cannot all be experts in everything, yet we still need to reduce our anxiety and gain a sense of order and meaning in our lives.[63]

A parallel example is provided when "henotheism" is used as an analytical category rather than an evolutionary stage, and it is pointed out that far from being monotheistic, the life of modern human beings could be described as consisting in part of a "henotheistic devotion to the nation, or the American way of life."[64]

(4) The philosophy of religion, by its very nature, tends to focus on the mind rather than the body, inasmuch as it claims to offer a rational explanation of religious experience and rationality is an activity of the mind. This definitional predisposition of the subject was only reinforced by the Cartesian mind-body dualism, although, until recently, the fact that much of its original subject-matter was provided by Christianity, which emphasizes the resurrection of the body, kept this tendency in check. The Hebraic insistence on the artificiality of the body-mind distinction has also been helpful in this respect. Jill Raitt, while reflecting on the encounter with

primal spiritualities, remarks: "I came back to the place where I started, thus describing the circular course spirituality often takes as seekers find an enriched understanding of what they intuited at the beginning. By way of summation I shall emphasize that material complex so ambiguously regarded today, namely, the human body."[65]

That Christians may be led to a greater recognition of the role of the physical body through the primal perspective on the philosophy of religions should not be surprising – for Christianity may be said to be predisposed to succumb to such a point of view. The striking fact here is the way in which such a perspective alters our understanding of the Hindu concept of reincarnation. The standard Hindu view takes the body no more seriously than a garment which is discarded at the time of death. Yet, when one investigates the recent literature on the subject, armed with the primal perspective, the evidence of the greater need for recognizing the role of the body becomes manifest. It becomes clear that *metempsychosis* contains elements of *metempsomasis*, which might otherwise have gone unnoticed. This point needs to be examined in some detail in the context of Hinduism, as the findings prompted by this point of view are highly significant.[66]

The doctrine of rebirth and Karma, in its classical formulation, typically treats the body occupied by the *jīva* or the living being, in one existence, as of little account in relation to the body acquired in the next birth. The evidence provided by cases of the reincarnation type compels one to reassess the situation in this regard, especially when one has been induced by the example of primal religions to focus on the body more seriously.

The case of Bishen Chand Kapoor provides dramatic evidence in this connection.[67] The evidence presented in this case by Ian Stevenson is summarized below. As a small child, Bishan Chand Kapoor (b. 1921) developed an eye-disease, which caused his eyes to become irritated and swell. At the same time the mother of one Laxmi Narain, who had died in 1918 and was living in Bareilly, dreamt that Bishan Chand Kapoor was having eye trouble. She recalled that her deceased son, Laxmi Narain, also suffered from an eye disease, whose symptoms were relieved by the application of an ointment, applied from the indigenous system of medicine known as Ayurveda. She, therefore, had the same ointment sent directly to the home of Bishan Chand Kapoor on her own, without even waiting to ascertain whether Bishan Chand Kapoor was in fact afflicted, a fact which duly impressed the child's father. The ointment was applied and relief obtained, on more than one occasion, until Bishen Chand Kapoor entered his teens, when the symptoms ceased. Ian Stevenson does not consider it "likely that Bishen Chand or anyone else can furnish particulars about the illness in question that will help us understand it better"; Bishen Chand himself "conjectured that for Laxmi Narain the eye disease – assuming that it was

similar to that of Bishen Chand – derived from his intoxication with alcohol or was made worse by that habit."[68]

There are, however, other cases which may also be taken into account before any balanced conclusion can be drawn. One such case is that of Ramoo and Rajoo Sharma, twins born in August 1964 in the village of Sham Nagara in U.P.[69] From around the age of three they both started showing signs of remembering a previous life. The account provided by them led to their identification with Bhimsen and Bhism Pitamah of the village Uncha Larpur, about 16 kilometres from Sham Nagara. They were also twins in their previous life and their tied-up bodies had been recovered from a well on May 2, 1964. The last time they were seen alive was April 28, 1964. The bodies were badly decomposed and their death was attributed to strangulation.

The fact that the Bhimsen and Bhism Pitamah has died unnaturally and that Ramoo and Rajoo Sharma, born in August 1964, bore unnatural birthmarks, which were immediately noticed by the mother (but not the father) is striking. Ian Stevenson states that he had never seen anything like them before "although I have now examined more that 200 birthmarks in subjects in these cases." Ian Stevenson is then led to the following conclusion:

> The murderers, in covering their crime by concealing the bodies of Bhimsen and Bhism Pitamah in a well, also prevented me from relating the birthmarks on Ramoo and Rajoo to recorded wounds on the bodies of Bhimsen and Bhism Pitamah; I have already explained that the bodies of the murdered twins had decomposed badly by the time the police found them and even further by the time autopsies were carried out. It is known, however, that the bodies were tied with ropes when they were extracted from the well. And secondhand evidence indicates that the captured twins had been held down with lathis while they were choked to death. The birthmarks on the trunks of Ramoo and Rajoo could therefore have some correspondence either with wounds made by the lathis (if these were used) or by the ropes used to tie the twins before their bodies were disposed of.[70]

This case, however, must be contrasted with that of Gopal Gupta who recalled being shot to death in a previous life as Shaktipal Sharma. Ian Stevenson found the case anomalous, in the sense that although Gopal Gupta recalled being shot in the chest, the birthmark was around his umbilicus. As a matter of general observation, birthmarks seem to play a significant role in reincarnation type cases, significant enough to entice a scholar into writing a book on the subject! The generalization has also been ventured that the shorter the interval between death and rebirth, the greater the chance of the occurrence of a birthmark. An interval of eight years intervened between

death and rebirth in the present case, which, in terms of the reincarnatory calculus, is considered "a relatively long interval."[71]

Similarly, the case of Jagdish Chandra is somewhat inconclusive. Jagdish Chandra was born in 1923 and on the basis of his account was identified as Jai Pal, son of Babu Pandey, a *panda* (priest) at Benares. Jagdish Chandra's father, K.K.N. Sahay had himself written down the statements of his son and Ian Stevenson regards it as "one of the best authenticated of all reincarnation cases."[72] Reports indicate that Jagdish Chandra had marks on each of his ears, which would be consistent with the fact that *pandas* of Benaras, which he was in the previous existence, have their ears pierced. However, no one could verify whether he had his ears pierced in *this* life in 1926 and whether the earrings he wore then were held in place through holes, and investigators did not detect any holes in 1961 or 1964.[73] A little more light is shed on the point by the case of Kumkum Verma, who was born on March 15, 1955 and identified on the basis of evidentiary accounts with one Sundari (1900-1950). Sundari had married twice and was particularly fond of a son, Misri Lal, by her first marriage,[74] who vouched for the fact that her mother, who was tall and on the fair side, had had her lobes pierced. Kumkum Verma was also tall, fair by Indian standards and her father told Ian Stevenson that, at her birth "marks were found on the lobes of her ears at the places where earrings would be attached."[75]

I have described these cases at some length and in some detail lest they be peremptorily dismissed out of hand. The point is that while those who disbelieve in reincarnation may continue to be sceptical of the phenomena as such and remain unimpressed by the cases cited above, even those who believe in it have underrated the element of physical continuity involved.

To conclude: on the basis of cases suggestive of reincarnation it seems possible to suggest that greater account needs to be taken of the *physical* connections between one body and another (than is done at the moment under a soul-dominated doctrine of reincarnation). Such a perspective is suggested by our study of primal religions, and may well have remained neglected otherwise.

IV

The reader by now must surely feel baffled by the induction of a doctrine of such doubtful validity as that of reincarnation from Hinduism, to impart respectability to the primal religion in the context of the philosophy of religion! The reasons for doing so, however, may be sounder than might be apparent at first sight. The first point to be made in this context is that, at one time, Hindu philosophy itself was hardly considered worth the name, when the only useful thing to appear from the East was considered to be the sun! It

is as a result of the tireless advocacy of scholars from or familiar with the East that the philosophy of religion is now prepared to take Eastern thought within its purview, to the extent that John Hick devotes *a whole chapter to the doctrine of reincarnation in his textbook on the Philosophy of Religion*. Might not some day the topic of magic similarly find its place in a textbook on the philosophy of religion, if the fact of the contribution that primal religions can make to the philosophy of religion is fully acknowledged? Are the following remarks the earnest of what is to follow?

> Consider, for example, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein's notations (1979) on his copy of a condensed edition of Frazer's *The Golden Bough*: 'Here, purging magic has itself the character of magic' ('*Das Ausschalten der Magie hat hier den Charakter der Magie selbst*'). It may be recalled that Frazer's own ambivalent suggestions that primitive superstitions underlie civilization's basic tenets of political authority, private property, and truth were delivered in the form of midnight lectures styled after the strange rites they claimed to reveal. Frazer, not devoid of romantic irony (particularly in *Psyche's Task*), was possibly sensitive to such paradoxes as those Wittgenstein would later inscribe in somewhat superior fashion in the margins of the book. Regardless, Wittgenstein's own *Philosophical Investigations* may imply that even purging the purging of magic (as when Wittgenstein corrects Frazer) 'has the character of magic' as well. The history of scholarship thus pulses to cyclic rhythms of victimhood and occasional redemption, redolent of widely distributed patterns of ritual and religion.[76]

The fact of the matter is that the philosophy of religion is the child of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment itself, however, not only enthroned Reason, it also tried to encompass a wider world and transcend Christian Europe not only in terms of its Christianity but also its Euro-centrism. Voltaire is as much known for his admiration of China as for his anti-clericism; and Rousseau also as much for his belief in the "noble savage" as for his attacks on the Church. The European colonial expansion which followed the Enlightenment contracted the "light" of Enlightenment to Reason and let the sphere of the East and primal societies slip into darkness. The Western intellectual tradition must undo not only the 'excesses' of Reason but also the regress it involved, by bringing other areas of the world within the scope of reason – an enterprise which Europe, shall one say, temporarily abandoned in its pursuit of Empire? Thus, in a sense, Europe will become the legatee of the Enlightenment in its fullest sense after the philosophy of religion has been shaped not only by the Western and Eastern religious traditions but by the primal religious tradition as well in equal measure.

CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPT OF GOD: MONOTHEISM

The first topic usually addressed in the philosophy of religion is that of God. We may therefore begin our survey of a primal perspective on the philosophy of religion by identifying the various dimensions of this concept which are taken into account in the philosophy of religion and then by bringing a primal perspective to bear on them. Such a standard text as John Hick's *Philosophy of Religion* treats the theme under the following rubrics: (1) Monotheism; (2) Infinite, Self-existent; (3) Creator; (4) Personal; (5) Loving, Good and (6) Holy. These are the categories under which people the world over discuss God, in over a dozen languages into which this book has been translated. The precedent is well-established and one might as well follow it.

The following remarks of Geoffrey Parrinder regarding African primal tradition help clear the air as we commence our discussion of the topic. He begins by addressing the idea of God.

> From the earlier view that African religion was crudely fetishistic, with an idea of God where it existed being an importation, informed opinion has now swung round to the conviction that most, if not all, African people have had a belief in a Supreme Being as an integral part of their world view and practised religion. The symposium *African Ideas of God* did much to establish this finally, but it has been supported by countless books and articles. Missionaries have found, often to their surprise, that they did not need to argue for the existence of God, or faith in a life after death, for both these fundamentals of world religion are deeply rooted in Africa.

He then addresses the idea of a High God as follows:

> Some writers refer to 'the High God', but this term sounds derogatory to educated African ears, suggesting that God is merely distant or transcendent. Here we shall speak of the Supreme Being, or God, as in normal English

> usage. It has been seen that African myths express many beliefs about God in graphic form. It is not necessary to accept the myths as true in detail; but they express a conviction in the spiritual direction of the universe. Modern science may express its theories in different ways, and in new symbols, but it is also making a religious search for truth and purpose in the universe. Myths speak about God in picture language, and other sources for an understanding of his character in African traditional religion are found in prayers, songs, proverbs, riddles, and some rituals.[1]

One may begin by noting a major distinctive feature of primal religions: that in some forms of it one encounters a Supreme Goddess. As Robin Horton remarks: "...the supreme being may not have the same sex as its Judeo-Christian counterpart. Among the Ijo-speaking peoples of the Niger Delta, for instance, this being is thought of as a woman and is referred to as 'Our Mother.' One does not have to be a sexual chauvinist to see this as a fairly fundamental difference of concept!"[2]

Monotheism: General Introduction

The term *monotheism* in the Western philosophy of religion is closely connected with its formulation in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and this terminology associated with it needs to be clearly grasped before one can employ these terms aseptically in other contexts.

John Hick has pointed out how a whole series of terms have "formed around either the Greek word for God, *theos*, or its Latin equivalent, *dues*,"[3] as representing main ways of "thinking about God."[4] He places the words thus formed on two scales, the negative and the positive.

> Beginning at the negative end of the scale, *atheism* (not-God-ism) is the belief that there is no God of any kind; *agnosticism*, which means literally "not-know-ism," is in this context the belief that we do not have sufficient reason either to affirm or to deny God's existence. *Skepticism* simply means doubting. *Naturalism* is the theory that every aspect of human experience, including the moral and religious life, can be adequately described and accounted for in terms of our existence as gregarious and intelligent animals whose life is organic to our natural environment.[5]

This completes one set of terms. Next,

> Moving to the positive side of the scale, *deism* can refer either to the idea of an "absentee" god who long ago set the universe in motion and has thereafter left it alone or, as an historical term, to the position of the eighteenth-century English deists, who taught that natural theology alone is religiously sufficient. *Theism* (often used as a synonym for monotheism) is belief in a personal deity. *Polytheism* (many-gods-ism) is the belief, common among

> ancient peoples and reaching its classic expression in the West in ancient Greece and Rome, that there are a multitude of personal gods, each ruling a different department of life. A person whose religion is a form of *henotheism* believes that there are many gods but restricts allegiance to one of them, generally the god of one's own tribe or people. *Pantheism* (God-is-all-ism) is the belief, perhaps most impressively expounded by some of the poets, that God is identical with nature or with the world as a whole. *Panentheism* (everything-in-God-ism) is the view that all things exist ultimately 'in God.' *Monotheism* (one-God-ism) is the belief that there is but one supreme Being, who is personal and moral and who seeks a total and unqualified response from human creatures. This idea first came to fully effective human consciousness in the words, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.' As these historic words indicate, the Semitic understanding of God, continued in Christianity and Islam, is emphatically monotheistic.[6]

The exercise might sound rather pedantic and even unnecessary to begin with, but its significance comes to the fore when it is placed alongside a similar structure identified by John S. Mbiti, as he commences his presentation of African religions in the context of philosophy. He points out that the word *animism*, first used by the English anthropologist E.B. Tylor in 1866, was initially used to describe African and indeed primal religions in general. Derived from the Latin word *anima* for breath (cf. Sanskrit *ātman*), he used it to denote "a shadowy vaporous image animating the object it occupied. He thought that the so-called 'primitive people' imagined the anima to be capable of leaving the body and entering other men, animals or things; and continuing to live after death." He then embellished the theory with the suggestion "that such 'primitive' men considered every object to have its own soul, thus giving rise to countless spirits in the universe."[7] Mbiti goes on to point out how:

> Tylor's ideas were popularized by his disciples. Since then, the term *animism* has come to be widely used in describing traditional religions of Africa and other parts of the world. In an atmosphere filled with the theory of evolution, the notion of countless spirits opened the way for the idea of religious evolution. This led on to the theory that single spirits existed over each major department of nature. For example, all the spirits of the rivers would have one major spirit in charge of them, and the same for trees, rocks, lakes and so on. Accordingly, this gave man the idea of many gods (*polytheism*), which in turn evolved further to the stage of one supreme God over all the other departmental spirits. We might illustrate this point with a diagram.[8]

Monotheism	One Supreme God
Polytheism	Major spirits (gods)
Animism	Countless spirits[9]

It is important to be aware of this because the philosophy of religion, no more or less than any other field of study, is not conducted in a historical vacuum. It is obvious, as Mbiti notes, that:

> This type of argument and interpretation places African religions at the bottom of the supposed line of religious evolution. It tells us that Judaism, Christianity and Islam are at the top, since they are monotheistic. The theory fails to take into account the fact that another theory equally argues that man's religious development began with a monotheism and moved towards polytheism and animism. We need not concern ourselves unduly here with either theory. We can only comment that African peoples are aware of all these elements of religion: God, spirits and divinities are part of the traditional body of beliefs. Christianity and Islam acknowledge the same type of spiritual beings.[10]

One might add that this is equally true of the opposite view, in which popular religion is seen as a corruption of a pristine African monotheism. Geoffrey Parrinder even alleges that the "study of the idea of God in Africa has been weakened by theorists, some of whom think that there has been an inevitable evolution from fetishism, to animism, to polytheism, and finally to monotheism. Others consider that there was an original monotheism from which all Africans fell, in a kind of Fall of Adam. Looking at things as they are today there is a picture of a mixed religion, which is not mere animism, nor a democratic polytheism, nor a pure monotheism. E.B. Idowu calls it 'diffused monotheism.'"[11]

The case of primal religion yields an interesting curiosity in the context of the word *deism*, which Hick identified as a term which could "refer either to the idea of an 'absentee' God who long ago set the universe in motion and has thereafter left it alone or, as an historical term, to the position of the eighteenth-century English deists, who taught that natural theology alone is religiously sufficient."[12] In a sense, however, even its first sense is historical, gaining currency, if understood as a "'rationalistic movement of the 17th and 18th centuries' according to which God 'after creating the world and the laws governing it refrained from interfering with the operation of those laws.'" It is clear that stories of the Sky Gods represent "a progressive withdrawal culminating in a form of deism,"[13] *prior* to its identification in Europe.

This very fact brings within our view an issue which would otherwise go unnoticed: that "two aspects of the question must be distinguished: the existence of the idea of God, and its degree of vitality in a given environment."[14] We have had a simulacrum of this distinction (in the discussion of the extent to which our purportedly monotheistic culture is really so[15]) but not the distinction itself, which relates to a distinction between the way in which monotheism itself is conceptualized (of which the distinction between deism à la Diderot and theism proper seems to be an anticipation).

"Theism": Some Specific Considerations

It should be apparent by now that there are features of primal religions about concepts of God which will have important philosophical implications for any philosophy of religion and that their significance would lie both in the points of convergence and divergence with the prevailing concepts in the field. A few may be listed here for the interest they might hold.

(1) There is no image worship as such in primal religions. This, apart from being an interesting fact in itself, becomes all the more interesting in a Western philosophical context, which tends to identify image worship as a primitive religious concept John S. Mbiti notes a pygmy hymn:

> In the beginning was God,
> Today is God,
> Tomorrow will be God.
> Who can make an image of God?
> He has no body.[16]

(2) The idea that the knowledge of the highest deity may be "too hot to handle" by those not prepared for it; or less colloquially, that such knowledge may possess an esoteric dimension of wisdom or power, which can only gradually be made exoteric also seems to indicate a point of potential convergence. This becomes obvious if the following two passages are read alongside, one about God in Christianity and the other about *wakan* in American Indian religion.

> The knowledge of God, like all knowledge, is at first confined to the few, and bestowed by methods by which only the few can be reached.[17]
>
> …
>
> *The necessity of pleasing the* wakan *underscored the need to recognize them, but since they were by nature incomprehensible, such understanding as was possible could only be achieved by human beings who shared to some degree in this incomprehensible power*. These holy men and women were religious specialists who gained their knowledge through direct contact with the

> *wakan* beings in dreams or visions, and they became themselves conduits through which this *wakan* power flowed.[18]

(3) God 'has no messengers.'[19] Western religions are based on an opposite presumption.

(4) Primal religions also have no scriptures, a crucial component of religion as conceived in the West.[20]

(5) Geoffrey Parrinder refers to a suggestion made by the scholar of African art, William Fagg, that 'there are more affinities between Christianity and 'pagan' religions than are usually admitted,'[21] and, immediately pursuing the suggestion as it were, proceeds to add: "One of the most significant is the similarity between fundamental African philosophical concepts of 'force' and the Christian concept of grace."[22] The promise this proposal might hold becomes evident if the following two statements, one by a Christian and the other by a primal thinker are set side by side. The first pertains to the theist, the second to the primalist.

> Believing that such material blessings as an abundant harvest and victory in war are dependent upon good relations with his God, requires of him in order that those *good relations* may continue, if they exist, or be restored, if they have been interrupted.[23]
>
> …
>
> The name of this fundamental life force is called *orenda*, from the Iroquois name of the energy inherent in everything in the cosmos. The *orendas* of the innumerable beings and objects are greatly different from one another and require different actions by which people may remain in a *positive relationship* with them.[24]

(6) Two other ideas impart a special flavour to the primal tradition. One of them is the idea of a vital force (of which the charisma could be viewed as a diluted manifestation). The five categories of (1) God (2) Spirits (3) Man (4) Animals and plants and (5) Phenomena and objects without biological life, need to be noted here. Mbiti begins by pointing out:

> Expressed anthropocentrically, God is the Originator and Sustainer of man; the Spirits explain the destiny of man; Man is the centre of this ontology; the Animals, Plants and natural phenomena and objects constitute the environment in which man lives, provide a means of existence and, if need be, man establishes a mystical relationship with them.

He then goes on to say:

> The anthropocentric ontology is a complete unity or solidarity which nothing can break up or destroy. To destroy or remove one of these categories is to destroy the whole existence including the destruction of the Creator, which is impossible. One mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart from one

> another nor get too close to one another. In addition to the five categories, there seems to be a force, power or energy permeating the whole universe. God is the Source and ultimate controller of this force; but the spirits have access to some of it. A few human beings have the knowledge and ability to tap, manipulate and use it, such as the medicine men, witches, priests and rainmakers, some for the good and others for the ill of their communities.[25]

(7) There is a special connection with Nature in the primal religious tradition. It is the common thread running through the primal traditions. For the moment it might do just to recognize this fact.[26]

Monotheism in Christianity and Primal Religions

Theodore M. Ludwig concludes his entry under monotheism, in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, with the remark that "Monotheistic thought, while often challenged by in tension with alternate and modified religious understandings, is still central to most of the Western world and will continue to be a dominant mode of experiencing and expressing the divine reality."[27] This conclusion is immediately confirmed as one opens the fourth edition of John Hick's widely used *Philosophy of Religion*, only to find that Chapter I on the Judaic-Christian concept of God commences with the rubric of monotheism.[28]

The dominance of monotheism as a model of thinking about the ultimate reality, therefore, must be the first element to be taken into account, as one proceeds to examine the contribution primal religious thought might make to the philosophy of religion. In fact, if Wilhelm Schmidt is to be believed, in a sense the primal philosophers beat everybody else to the punch when it comes to monotheism. According to Wilhelm Schmidt, contrary to the widely held view at the time, monotheism represents the earliest human perception of God instead of the most evolved. This theory of *urmonotheismus* or "original monotheism" held that the prevalent polytheism so evident in "primitive religions" represented a corruption and degeneration of this original monotheism. Andrew Lang also held similar views.[29] While the theory may be difficult to uphold as it stands, most scholars accept it as a fact that among many primal or archaic peoples, such as those in Africa and Australia and among hunters in Tierra del Fuego, one finds evidence of a conception of a single high God who is creator and regulator of the universe and upholder of morality.[30]

It should, however, be immediately remarked that such a "supreme high God characteristically is a remoter God (*deus otiosus*) [*not deus absconditis*], too distant, all-powerful, good and just to need worship or to be intimately involved in ordinary existence; there are lesser Gods and spirits who play a much more active role in the lives of the people."[31] In other words, while

God in classical monotheism is often treated under the headings (1) monotheism; (2) infinite, self-existent; (3) creator; (4) personal; (5) loving, good and (6) holy [32]; primal religious thought seems to hint at the incompatibility, in some ways, between categories (2) and (5), (on which more later). For the moment we may note that primal thought here, in general, anticipates a philosophical argument which emerges in the modern philosophy of religion, namely, that as against the ideality of monotheism, the reality of its practise may reflect a society, such as the modern, which 'tends towards henotheism, making one particular society into the center of value and object of loyalty' as H. Richard Niebuhr argues in *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture*, [33] or even into a combination of 'polytheistic and henotheistic elements.' As John Hick has remarked:

> ...A religiously sensitive visitor from another planet would doubtless report that we divide our energies in the service of many deities – the god of money, of a business corporation, of success, and of power, the status gods, and (for a brief period once a week) the God of Judaic-Christian faith. When we rise above this practical polytheism, it is generally into a henotheistic devotion to the nation, or to the American way of life, in order to enjoy our solidarity with an in-group against the out-groups. In this combination of elements there is no continuity with the pure monotheism of the prophets and of the New Testament, with its vivid awareness of God as the Lord of history whose gracious purpose embracing all life renders needless the frantic struggle to amass wealth, power, and prestige at the expense of others.[34]

Such religious sensitivity may already have been a part of the perceptions of the primal philosopher, as it is of the Hebrew scriptures themselves which "document the rise of monotheism in constant but never fully resolved struggle with polytheism and henotheism."[35]

The crucial question which primal religions raise for the philosophy of religion is the philosophical merit of *remote*, as distinguished from *immediate*, monotheism. It may indeed be true that immediate monotheism "is intrinsically universal."[36] Certainly the Judeo-Christian experience would incline one towards this view. John Hick's following account of it sets the stage for developing the point further:

> ...The God of the Hebrews was originally worshiped as a tribal god, Jahweh of Israel, over against such foreign deities as Dagon of the Philistines and Chemosh of the Moabites. But the insistent, though at first incredible, message of the great prophets of the eighth, seventh, and sixth centuries before the Christian era (above all, Amos, Hosea, first Isaiah, Jeremiah, and second Isaiah) was that Jahweh was not only the God of the Hebrews but the Maker of heaven and earth and the Judge of all history and of all peoples. The Hebrew prophets taught that although God had indeed summoned their own nation to a special mission as the living medium of his revelation to the

> world, he was not only their God but also Lord of the gentiles or foreigners. A great biblical scholar said, 'Hebrew monotheism arose through the intuitive perception that a God who is righteous first and last must be as universal as righteousness itself.' The service of such a God must involve a responsibility not only to fellow members of the same 'household of faith' but to all one's fellow creatures of every race and group.[37]

If the opening lines occasion inspiration, the closing lines cause concern. They provide the hotbed for what Paul Radin has called "moral exceptionalism,"[38] which has been associated with intolerance. It is indeed ironical that universalism should produce such an effect.[39] The Indian thinker, S. Radhakrishnan says forthrightly:

> The intolerance of narrow monotheism is written in letters of blood across the history of man from the time when first the tribes of Israel burst into the land of Canaan. The worshippers of the one jealous God are egged on to aggressive wars against people of alien cults. They invoke divine sanction for the cruelties inflicted on the conquered. The spirit of old Israel is inherited by Christianity and Islam, and it might not be unreasonable to suggest that it would have been better for Western civilization if Greece had moulded it on this question rather than Palestine.[40]

The inhabitants of India, or Indian Indians, somehow survived this assault but the American Indians, the Australian Aborigines and the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the American continent, it seems, were less fortunate. Works by several scholars of primal religions, such as Vine Deloria, Jr. (*God is Red*) and Jamake Highwater (*The Primal Mind*)[41] are shot through with the suggestion that monotheistic universalism, transformed into Christian imperialism, virtually destroyed the primal religious tradition.

The point then is that the uncritical philosophical acceptance of monotheism, without regard to its historical consequences, is bad philosophy of *religion*, if it threatens the very continuance of a religion.

The other issue it raises is more philosophical: what is wrong with polytheism, especially of the kind which allows for a remote or ultimate monotheism? The comparison between federalism and totalitarianism may be instructive here in terms of a political analogy, but philosophically, it seems, the primal religious tradition is encouraging us to think of four distinctions: (1) the distinction between unity and uniformity; (2) the distinction between numerical and teleological unity; (3) the distinction between monotheism and monolatry, and, at another level; (4) the distinction between a monotheistic god and a not necessarily monolithic community. The suggestion is being thrown out that there need not be a one-to-one correspondence between the ontic and the noetic – the one reality may have many images or wear many masks. The primal religious tradition, while accepting monotheism, rejects the implied isomorphism of the one God with

homogeneity, mathematical unicity, monolatry and monolithic community – that "paradoxical Western position: one plus one equals One."[42]

Another direction in which the philosophy of religion moves the concept of monotheism is the unity of all dimensions of life coming under the sway of one God, or what has sometimes been referred to as monarchic monotheism. John Hick writes: "It is a corollary of the prophets' teaching concerning the lordship of God over all life that there is no special religious sphere set apart from the secular world but that the whole sweep of human existence stands in relation to God. Thus religion is secularized, or – to put it another way – ordinary life takes on a religious meaning."[43] He also cites H. Richard Niebuhr in support, as follows:

> The counterpart of this secularization, however, is the sanctification of all things. Now every day is the day that the Lord has made; every nation is a holy people called by him into existence in its place and time and to his glory; every person is sacred, made in his image and likeness; every living thing, on earth, in the heavens, and in the waters is his creation and points in its existence toward him; the whole earth is filled with his glory; the infinity of space is his temple where all creation is summoned to silence before him.[44]

This is a very delicate point, both philosophically and historically. From a philosophical point of view the idea of the whole of life constituting one sphere has its simulacrum in primal religion: yet the resemblance is specious because it represents an apparently similar outcome reached by opposite processes of thought. But first let us recognize the similarity. Huston Smith observes: "Turning from the world's structure to human activities, we are again struck by the relative absence of compartmentalizations between them. For example, 'Among the languages of American Indians there is no word for 'art', because for Indians everything is art.' Equally, everything is, in its way, religious. This means that to learn of primal religion, we can start anywhere, with paintings, dance, drama, poetry, songs, dwellings, or even utensils and other artifacts. Or we could study the daily doings of its peoples, which are also not separated in sacred and profane."[45]

However, while this single sphere in the monotheistic tradition is one of common bond (consider one etymology of the word religion itself, for instance); in the primal tradition it is *organic*. It is all one in monotheism because it was all created out of nothing; it is all one in primal religions because it is all made as one thing. As Huston Smith points out, in primal religions we find

> nothing like the notion of creation *ex nihilo*.[46] Primal people are, we are emphasizing, oriented to a single cosmos, which sustains them like a living womb. Because they assume that it exists to nurture them, they have no disposition to challenge it, defy it, refashioned it, or escape from it. It is not a

> place of exile or pilgrimage, though pilgrimages take place within it. Its space is not homogeneous; the home has a number of rooms, we might say, some of which are normally invisible. But together they constitute a single domicile. Primal peoples are concerned with the maintenance of personal, social, and cosmic harmony, and with attaining specific goods – rain, harvest, children, health – as people always are. But the overriding goal of salvation that dominates the historical religions is virtually absent from them, and life after death tends to be a shadowy semi-existence in some vaguely designated place in their single domain.[47]

From the historical point of view, which is also consequential philosophically, the issue turns on the implication of God's activity in history,[48] a point which intrudes on the holistic visions presented by John Hick and H. Richard Niebuhr. This subject is a matter of considerable controversy but perhaps it is not surprising that representatives of primal religion see the emergence of the separate domains of the church and the state within Christianity as symptomatic of its lack of inner wholeness.[49] In this respect Judaism and Islam come closer to participating in the seamlessness of life primal religion celebrates through their comprehensive notion of Law. However, according to Huston Smith all historical religions, by contrast with primal, draw a line "separating this world from another world that stands over and against it." [50] And this both exonerates Christianity and makes it more culpable. It exonerates it because other historical religions also suffer by comparison but it increases its culpability because it suffers all the more by this comparison.

CHAPTER II

OTHER CONCEPTS OF GOD

The question of monotheism has been a vexed one in the study of religion. The concept has around it such a halo in Western thought that it almost invariably imparts a tint of value judgement to the vision of the scholars from a monotheistic tradition, as they survey other traditions. Monotheism is the central, but it is not the only attribute of God which needs to be reconfigured as the philosophical vision is extended to encompass the primal religions.

Infinite, Self-Existent

There are passages in the works of Mircea Eliade, when he talks of the sky and sky gods, which are so eloquent in the testimony they offer to the attributes of infinity and self-existence of the sky-gods that it is futile to try to summarize them; it would be wiser to relinquish a part of this section to them since we do not hope to surpass them. Of the many passages the following is perhaps most to the point, which describes how the primal human being, no more than us, had the need "to look into the teachings of myth to see that the sky itself directly reveals a transcendence, a power and a holiness." As Mircea Eliade explains it:

> All this derives from simply contemplating the sky; but it would be a great mistake to see it as a logical, rational process. The transcendental quality of "height," or the supra-terrestrial, the infinite, is revealed to man all at once, to his intellect as to his soul as a whole. The symbolism is an immediate notion of the whole consciousness, of the man, that is, who realizes himself as a man, who recognizes his place in the universe; these primeval realizations are bound up so organically with his life that the same

> symbolism determines both the activity of his subconscious and the noblest expressions of his spiritual life. It really is important, therefore, this realization that though the symbolism and religious values of the sky are not deduced logically from a calm and objective observation of the heavens, neither are they exclusively the product of mythical activity and non-rational religious experience. Let me repeat: even before any religious values have been set upon the sky it reveals its transcendence. The sky "symbolizes" transcendence, power and changelessness simply by being there. It exists because it is high, infinite, immovable, powerful.[1]

Neither does Eliade fail to note that "the most popular prayer in the world is addressed to 'Our Father who art in heaven,'"[2] It is possible that man's earliest prayers were addressed to the same heavenly father – it would explain the testimony of an African of the Ewe tribe: "There where the sky is, God is too."[3] Although it is "difficult to say precisely," "when this hierophany became personified, when the divinities of the sky showed themselves, or took the place of the holiness of the sky as such," nevertheless it "is quite certain that sky divinities have always been supreme divinities."[4]

In explaining the Judeo-Christian concept of God as involving infinity of unlimitedness, John Hick hints that while this is true of Judeo-Christian monotheism in general "because Christianity has become a more theologically articulated religion than Judaism, most of our material will be taken from this source."[5] In a somewhat similar way, it may be suggested that while God as infinite and self-existent is an acceptable description within the primal religious tradition in general, it is spelled with particular clarity in the African primal religious tradition. In Western religions the idea of the infinity of God tends to be associated with both time and space, but more with time than space, so that the emphasis comes to rest on his eternality. This is clearly recognized in the African primal religions[6]; however, for reasons having to do with the notions of time in Africa,[7] there it is in spatial rather than temporal terms that "people more readily conceive of God's transcendence. God is thought of as dwelling far away in the sky, or 'above', beyond the reach of men. Obviously the sky with its great immensity invites people to gaze in it, with their eyes and imagination. Practically all African people associate God with the sky, in one way or another. Some have myths telling of how men came from the sky; or how God separated from men and withdrew Himself into the sky, whence nobody could directly reach Him."[8]

One can detect here, it seems to me, the "emphasizing of the point, which was familiar to the medieval scholastics, that the creator and the creature cannot be said to exist in precisely the same sense."[9]

The more formal word used to refer to God's attribute of self-existence is *aseity*, a word

> usually translated as "self-existence." The concept of self-existence, as it occurs in the work of the great theologians, contains two elements:
>
> 1. God is not dependent either for existence or for characteristics upon any other reality. God has not been created by any higher being. There is nothing capable either of constituting or of destroying God. God just *is*, in infinite richness and plenitude of being as the ultimate, unconditioned, all-conditioning reality. In abstract terms, God has absolute ontological independence.
>
> 2. It follows from this that God is eternal, without beginning, there would have to be a prior reality to bring God into being; and in order for God's existence to be terminated, there would have to be some reality capable of effecting this. Each of these ideas is excluded by God's absolute ontological independence.[10]

In view of the misconceptions which cloud the understanding of the attributes of God in primal religions, the following statement of Geoffrey Parrinder shines forth as a bank of light on this point:

> It is clear that God exists by himself; he is not the creature of any other being but is the cause of everything else. His pre-eminence and his greatness go together. But since he is greater than any other spirit or man, God is mysterious and nobody can understand him, he creates and destroys, he gives and takes away. God is invisible, infinite and unchangeable. Although his wife or wives and children appear in myths, yet in himself God is one, and only rarely is the notion found of a twin deity. Heaven and earth, sun and moon, day and night, man and woman, are dual but God is the unity beyond all this. The duality is not discussed as it is in Hindu speculation, but the unity of God follows from his pre-eminence and sole creation. It has been said that God might have been banished from Greek thought without damaging its logical architecture, but this cannot be said of African thought, as God is both the creator and the principle of unity that holds everything together. He is the source and essence of force, Ntu, which inspires the whole vital organism.[11]

Thus this point is clearly recognized in the primal religion tradition. The following two articulations of this concept by Mbiti should suffice to establish this on the basis of evidence derived from African religions. According to their beliefs "Ontologically [God] is transcendent in that all things were made by Him, whereas He is self-existent."[12] Or, more descriptively:

> A number of African peoples think of God as self-existent and pre-eminent. From the Zulu we get a clear expression of this concept. They give one name to God which means: 'He Who is of Himself' or 'He Who came of Himself into being.' The Bambuti think that God 'never die.' These are theological

> and philosophical expressions; but there are others of a biological nature. Thus, the Gikuyu believe that God has
>
> > No father nor mother, nor wife nor children;
> > He is all alone.
> > He is neither a child nor an old man;
> > He is the same today as He was yesterday.
>
> They go on to point out that He does not eat, and has no messengers. In almost identical words, the Herero say that God has no father and is not a man. These statements indicate that God is self-originating. In human terms, it is clearly emphasized that God is uncreated, without parents, without family, without any of the things that compose or sustain human life. He is truly self-dependent, absolutely unchangeable and unchanging.[13]

However, the role of culture heroes should not be forgotten here, just as the prophets should not be forgotten in the Judeo-Christian tradition for "the culture hero may be identical with the creator God, or with the first ancestor, or with both; he may be identified with a certain animal (the chameleon, rabbit, crow) or a visible phenomenon (moon, sun)."[14]

Creator

Vine Deloria, Jr. remarks about Christianity and American Indian religions that "Both religions can be said to agree on the role and activity of a creator." He goes on to add, however, that "outside of that specific thing, there would appear to be little that the two views share."[15]

Creation has special meaning in Christianity and the thrust of it all is to distinguish it, set it apart from God, for in the Christian doctrine "creation means far more than fashioning new forms from an already given material (as a builder makes a house or a sculptor a statue); it means creation out of nothing – *creatio ex nihilo....*"[16] Such a doctrine produces at least the following consequences: (1) it makes the creator totally distinct from creation; (2) it makes creation absolutely dependent on the creator; (3) it makes creation temporally contingent, ruling out an eternal universe. This temporal contingency could either imply that the universe was created at a point in time or that time is itself contained in creation (Augustine's view), "that creation did not take place *in* time but time is itself an aspect of the created world. If this is true it may also be, as relativity theory suggests, that space-time is internally infinite – that is to say, from within the space-time continuum the universe is found to be unbounded both spatially and temporally. It may nevertheless, although internally infinite, depend for its existence on the will of a transcendent Creator."[17]

The relationship between creator and creation is rather different in primal religion. Thus it is said that "*Wakan Taka* created the universe, but at the same time comprised the universe,"[18] as the Lakota nation tells us, which "began not with the arrival of Columbus but with the creation of this universe."[19] In this process of creation the emergence of the universe as a whole has much less significance, unlike Christianity, than the emergence of its specifics or what involves the naming of the animals in the biblical creation story, for this is "the time in which creation takes place as we know it now." This is the time known as 'the dreaming.' Creation, unlike in Christianity, does not take place *in* time but *on* time.[20] Huston Smith describes the process and its implications as follows:

> The world that the aborigines ordinarily experience is measured out by time; the seasons cycle, and generations come and go. Meanwhile, the backdrop for this unending procession is stable. Time does not touch it, for it is "everywhen." Legendary figures people this backdrop world. They are not gods; they are much like ourselves, while at the same time being larger than life. What gives them their exceptional status is that they originated, or better instituted, the paradigmatic acts of which daily life consists. They were geniuses for having molded and thereby modeled life's essential conditions – male and female; human, bird, fish, and the like – and its essential activities such as hunting, gathering, war, and love.

As a consequence even the specific activities within the universe become spiritually potent:

> ...when the Arunta go hunting they mime the exploits of the first and archetypal hunter, but this distinguishes them from their archetype too sharply. It is better to say that they enter the mold of their archetype so complete that each *becomes* the First Hunter; no distinction remains. Similarly for other activities, from basket weaving to lovemaking. Only while they are conforming their actions to the model of some archetypal hero do the Arunta feel that they are truly alive, for in those roles they are immortal. The occasions on which they slip from such molds are quite meaningless, for time immediately devours those occasions and reduces them to nothingness.[21]

According to scholars of primal religion, the Christian view of creation and time entails serious disadvantages. It downgrades nature and tries to compress the globe into the mental horizon of the Middle East. It alienates not only nature from God but also from human beings, since he is given dominion over it. As against this plethora of negative associations,[22] the primal view of creation is not only recommended as holistic and wholesome[23] but as consistent with modern scientific thought, as Augustinian view of Christian creation is with Einstein's.[24]

In any case, the accounts of creation in Christianity and primal religions show an initial convergence and a subsequent divergence. The account of creation prior to the activity of Dreamtime as found in *Popol Vun*, of the Quiche Maya,[25] is almost biblical.

> The surface of the earth was not yet made. There was only the quietude of water and a vast expanse of blue sky. There was nothing yet brought together, nothing which could make a sound, nor anything which might tremble or gesture or sigh. Not in the sky nor in the water was there breathing or dreaming. There was nothing standing; only the calm sea, the motionless water, alone within itself and silent. Nothing yet existed. There was only a tireless immobility and a perpetual stillness in the vast and deep darkness of the night.[26]

But then, as Young Chief, a Cayuse, stated when he felt that creation has been left out of the Treaty of Walla Walla:

> I wonder if the ground has anything to say? I wonder if the ground is listening to what is said? I wonder if the ground would come alive and what is on it? Though I hear what the ground says. The ground says, It is the Great Spirit that placed me here. The Great Spirit tells me to take care of the Indians, to feed them aright. The Great Spirit appointed the roots to feed the Indians on. The water says the same thing. The Great Spirit directs me, feed the Indians well. The grass says the same thing. Feed the Indians well. The ground, water and grass say, the Great Spirit has given us our names. We have these names and hold these names. The ground says, The Great Spirit placed me here to produce all that grows on me, trees and fruit. The same way the ground says, It was from me man was made. The Great Spirit, in placing men on earth, desired them to take good care of the ground and to do each other no harm.[27]

Even here Vine Deloria, Jr., notes the striking resemblance with the Genesis story,[28] only to indicate the different trajectory involved. And the following account of creation among the Winnebago Indians (a Sioux group) is worthy of the Upaniṣads. 'In the beginning, "He who made the earth" was seated in empty space, when he became aware of himself and that nothing else existed. He began to think and tears flowed from his eyes, falling on the earth beneath. After some time he looked down and saw something shining. This shining thing was the secret tears which had fallen and formed the present waters. When his tears flowed, they became the lakes we see now. The creator began to think once more. He thought: "It is thus when I desire something. It will be done as it has been done, as I desire it, as my tears have become lakes." Thus he thought. Thus he desired light and there was light.'[29]

These descriptions are helpful in conveying a flavour of primal thought. It may be more philosophically expressed, especially with the African material in view. In doing so it is well to remember that because "nature of

time in African religion is much more past-oriented by comparison with the future-oriented Western thought,"[30] the idea of creation achieves a salience not paralleled in Western thought. The point needs to be explained in some detail:

> Each African people has its own history. This history moves 'backward' from the Sasa [proximate] period to the Zamani [remote], from the moment of intense experience to the period beyond which nothing can go. In traditional African thought, there is no concept of history moving 'forward' towards a future climax, or towards an end of the world. Since the future does not exist beyond a few months, the future cannot be expected to usher in a golden age, or a radically different state of affairs from what is in the Sasa and Zamani.

This implies that the "notion of messianic hope, or a final destruction of the world, has no place in traditional concept of history." As a result:

> African peoples have no 'belief in progress,' the idea that the development of human activities and achievements move from a low to a higher degree. The people neither plan for the distant future nor 'build castles in the air.' The centre of gravity for human thought and activities is the Zamani period, towards which the Sasa moves. People set their eyes on the Zamani, since for them there is no 'World to Come,' such as is found in Judaism and Christianity.[31]

Might this also explain why *ille tempore* in primal thought seems to imply a status analogous to the *eschaton* in Western thought? Both seem to transcend time in their own way, but at opposite ends of the continuum.

In view of the digressions undertaken above, one may conclude this section with a recognition of God as creator in primal religion to signal a return to the main theme.[32]

Personal

John Hick makes three distinct points in presenting the Judeo-Christian concept of God as personal. One of these is to distinguish between speaking of God as "personal" in preference to describing him as a "person." He writes:

> Most theologians speak of God as "personal" rather than as "a Person." The latter phrase suggests the picture of a magnified human individual. (Thinking of the divine in this way is called anthropomorphism, from the Greek *anthropos*, man, and *morphe*, shape – "in the shape of man.") The statement that God is personal is accordingly intended to signify that God is "at least personal," that whatever God may be beyond our conceiving, God is not less then personal, not a mere It, but always the higher and transcendent divine Thou.[33]

This point is interesting because it is the first point a primal religious thinker raises when comparing and contrasting Judeo-Christian concept of God with the primal God, who is supposed to be a distant God, too distant to be personal. Joseph Goetz has argued, however, that there is scope for being misled here. He begins by observing: "The distant god (*deus otiosus*) of specialized cultures is no more a philosophical idea than the idea of God itself. Men who have reflected on the nature of the universe from animism through polytheism, and especially from biocosmology (which, as we shall see, is the other side of the coin in agrarian religions) have not arrived at the idea of the Creator, but at that of an eternal cyclic world of which the gods are a part. Why then should they retain the useless supplement of the celestial god? Is it because cosmic immanentism is not an adequate answer to the principle of sufficient reason? In theory the answer is yes, but in practice these cultures have answers enough and to spare."[34] And one of these answers is that

> Everything is explained in detail and even as a whole on a solid empirical basis. Moreover, any attempt to establish the role of this distant god reveals that these people know nothing of creation, or if they do attribute it to God, they do so superficially. On the detailed level, everything has its own creator. This celestial God is kept in reserve, not as an explanation of existence, but as a last resort for help in the gravest biological crises. In the last analysis, it is he alone who disposes of life, and so once again the essential attribute of the Sky God – the supreme field of life – is clearly underlined.[35]

Moreover, in a crisis in an assignable realm, one turns to other Gods, such as the Master of Animals but as for the Sky God: "This is a God about whom they know nothing, who is called upon to intervene when they are faced with questions about which they know nothing."[36]

> Life is, moreover, the only reality which actually evades man's grasp. He only sets its conditions, but it infinitely surpasses him who shares in it. The profoundest thinking of the agrarian cultures has made it an absolute – the absolute in the universe. It is also the only thing which preoccupies in any religious sense the hunters, with their Master of Animals.[37]

In other words, the philosophically refined Western understanding of God as 'personal,' is close to the popular tribal understanding![38]

A second significant point which John Hick makes in relation to the concept of God as 'personal' in Judeo-Christian thought runs as follows:

> Although belief in the Thou-hood of God thus pervades the Judaic-Christian tradition, the explicit doctrine that God is personal is of comparatively recent date, being characteristic of the theology of the nineteenth and especially of the twentieth century. In our own time the Jewish religious thinker Martin Buber has pointed to the two radically different kinds of relationship, I-Thou

> and I-It; and a number of Christian theologians have developed the implications of the insight that God is the divine Thou who has created us as persons in God's own image and who always deals with us in ways that respect our personal freedom and responsibility.[39]

The fact that "the explicit doctrine that God is personal is of comparatively recent date, being characteristic of the nineteenth and especially the twentieth century" is particularly worth noting in the present context. Among the Lakota, for instance, belief in a supreme deity called *Wakan Tanka* is widely prevalent. "It was the animating force of the universe, the common denominator of the oneness. The totality of these life-giving forces was called *Wakan Tanka...*"[40] Thus *Wakan Tanka* is to be understood as a 'person' in a very distinct sense: "rather than a single being, *Wakan Tanka* embodied the totality of existence."[41] It is also worth noting that "...not until Christian influences began to affect Lakota belief did *Wakan Tanka* become personified."[42] Moreover, one finds the dual relationship posited by Martin Buber also capable of extension to *Wakan*. "Like the *Taku Wakan* which the Lakotas told Densmore referred to the visible manifestations of *Wakan*, *Wakan Tanka* was an amorphous category most precisely defined by incomprehesity"[43] and reminiscent of the Hindu distinction between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa brahman*.

The third point John Hick makes in presenting the Judaic-Christian concept of God as personal is to point to the fact that

> The conviction that God is personal has always been plainly implied both in the biblical writings and in later Jewish and Christian devotional and theological literature. In the Old Testament God speaks in personal terms (for example, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob") and the prophets and psalmists address God in personal terms (for example, "hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer."). In the New Testament the same conviction of the personal character of God is embodied in the figure of fatherhood that was constantly used by Jesus as the most adequate earthly image with which to think of God.[44]

Let us place alongside this the fact that "Toward the close of his life, Black Elk, a shaman of the Oglala Sioux, often fell on all fours to play with toddlers. 'We have much in common', he said, 'They have just come from the Great Mysterious and I am about to return to it'"[45]

Apart from the fact that Black Elk solves the riddle of the Sphinx in his own Indian way, his approach gives us an indication of the contribution the primal religious experience can make to the philosophy of religion, for it compels us to look at the 'person' and the nature of the relationship called 'personal' more closely. There can be four combinations of the object as 'person' or otherwise, and the relationship to it: (1) one can have a personal relationship with the person, as of a friend to friend; (2) or one can have an

impersonal relationship to a person, as when Mr. Clinton is accepted as the President of the U.S.A. with no personal charge being involved in that recognition; similarly, (3) one would also have a personal relationship with the impersonal, as when we are ready to die for a just cause; or (4) one could merely have an impersonal relationship with the impersonal, as that of a mathematician towards astronomy, for instance.

Philosophy of religion, as it stands, lacks this nuanced understanding of the personal because in it both the object and the attitude are naturally assumed to be personal. But this need not always be the case. In some forms of primal religions, the concept of God seems to be less personal but the attitude is personal. Is this so because regarding God as personal both in object and attitude makes him "just another being in addition to those we know in the world"?

The personal dimension of the divine in the context of primal religions can be elaborated further with the help of a typology developed by Wilhelm Dupré. He distinguishes four aspects in the realization of the divine person: (1) the presence-experience of the person as such; (2) the presence-experience with an element of hypostatization, as when the person is present as a body, gesture or voice, even a deed; (3) the experience of an interpersonal relationship, either individually or communally and (4) the experience with an element of interpretation, as when one might think of his character, reactions, status, etc.. It is of course true that "all these aspects are infinitely interwoven with one another, they nevertheless do help in the attempt to decipher the immediate situation and thus offer guidelines for the description of the problem at issue."[46]

Evidence from the African primal tradition confirms the personal nature of the experience of God. Two famous testimonies are provided by E.E. Evans-Pritchard's *Nuer Religion* and G. Lienhardt's, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka*, which are referred to by John S. Mbiti as "the two...classical representatives of this genre."[47]

However, one should not lose sight of the core idea of God as a person as one concludes this section: "Although he is symbolized in many ways and pictured by many images, God can be called upon because he is neither symbol nor image, but the transcendent pole of life as far as the person-in-the-becoming is concerned. He is, strictly speaking, the ineffability of man as a person, and all that can be said about him is already an explanation of the mythic awareness, whether it be that he created heaven and earth in the beginning, or that earth and man are there by being his possession."[48]

Loving, Good

In order to do justice to this section one must begin with a digression. The Supreme Beings were referred to earlier. It should now be recognised that

although in this chapter we have tried to place them alongside the concept of monotheism, it is the "understanding of supreme beings *outside* monotheism [which] has remained a priority for scholars who study religion in a comparative and historical frame of reference."[49] To adduce the evidence on this point from primal religions one may turn to the evidence from "Australia...the only continent that did not undergo the Neolithic experience, which elsewhere began about 10,000 B.C. and witnessed the invention of farming and technically advanced stone implements. This exemption places the Australian aborigines closest among extant peoples to the earth's original human inhabitants, with the negligible exception of a time tribe in the Philippines, the Tassaday, whose authenticity is disputed. The world of aboriginal religion is a single one. We shall see that other primal religions resemble it in this respect, but the 'antiquity' of the aborigines makes the sharpest division in their world – every world includes divisions of some sort – seem subdued in comparison to its counterparts in other primal cosmologies."[50]

The relevant evidence on the Supreme Beings from Australia is consummately summarized by Mircea Eliade as follows:

> In general it is true to say that these divine beings of the Australians preserve a direct and concrete connection with the sky, with the world of stars and meteors. Of all of them we know that they made the universe and created man (that is, man's mythical ancestor); in their short stay on earth they revealed mysteries (almost all of which could be reduced to a communication of the mythical genealogy of the tribe, and certain epiphanies of thunder like the bull-roarer, and so on), and instituted civil and moral laws. *They are good (they are called "Our Father"), they reward the upright and defend morality.* They play the major part in all initiation ceremonies (as for example with the Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi and the Yuin and Kuri) and prayers are even addressed directly to them (as with the Yuin and the Kuri in the South).
>
> Yet, at the same time, it must also be recognized that:
>
> But nowhere does the belief in such Supreme Beings dominate religious life. The characteristic element in Australian religion is not the belief in a heavenly being, a supreme creator, but totemism. We find the same situation, elsewhere; the supreme divinities of the sky are constantly pushed to the periphery of religious life where they are almost ignored; other sacred forces, nearer to man, more accessible to his daily experience, more useful to him fill the leading role.[51]

It might be useful here to make a distinction between *Loving* and *Good*, and treat of the *Good* first. The title can be a trifle misleading. It implies not so much that God is good, as that he sets the standard for what is Good and Bad, and sides with goodness and punishes evil. In fact, John Hick discusses the 'wrath' of God under this very title.

In relation to monotheism and morality, the philosophy of religion confronts a paradox. The ground for it is laid by John Hick with the following observation:

> In this exposition we have subsumed the goodness of God under the love of God. But this does not avoid an important philosophical problem concerning the belief that God is good. Does that belief imply a moral standard external to God, in relation to which God can be said to be good? Or alternatively, does it mean that God is good by definition, so that God's nature, whatever it may be, is the norm of goodness?[52]

He then spells out the paradox as follows:

> Either position involves difficulties. If God is good in relation to some independent standard of judgment, God is no longer the sole ultimate reality, but exists in a moral universe whose character is not divinely ordained. If, however, God is good by definition, and it is a tautology that whatever God commands is right, other implications arise which are hard to accept. Suppose that, beginning tomorrow, God wills that human beings should do all the things that God has formerly willed they should not do. Now hatred, cruelty, selfishness, envy, and malice are virtues. God commands them; and since God is good, whatever God wills is right. This possibility is entailed by the view we are considering; yet it conflicts with the assumption that our present moral principles and intuitions are generally sound, or at least that they do not point us in a completely wrong direction.[53]

The resolution which he suggests, he himself admits, is frankly circular:

> Good is a relational concept, referring to the fulfillment of a being's nature and basic desires. When humans call God good, they mean that God's existence and activity constitute the condition of humanity's highest good. The presupposition of such a belief is that God has made human nature in such a way that our highest fulfillment is in fact to be found in relation to God. Ethics and value theory in general are independent of religion in that their principles can be formulated without any mention of God; yet they ultimately rest upon the character of God, who has endowed us with the nature whose fulfillment defines our good.[54]

The paradox which emerges in the context of primal religions is chronological rather than logical. The ground for it may be laid by alluding to Hick's reference to God as father in Christian thought, whose claim on our conscience may be "viewed as an expression of divine love." In relation to the Supreme Beings, as Eliade also noted, the "name of Father" occurs and, adds Goetz, "It occurs most constantly meaning simply that," he goes on to say: "The image of the Father *Paterfamilias*, prevails over the idea of the creator."[55] The connection between God and morality is established as follows:

> No religious document expresses this theological doctrine more clearly than does the conclusion of the creation myth of the Wiyot Indians (California). The equation is perfectly drawn: voice of conscience = presence of God = reminder of creation. God concludes with these words: "For as long as there are men on earth, when an old man tells his son something of me, it will be as if I were present, for he will say: 'Do not do this or that thing.'"[56]

The paradox of the situation is then identified by M. Leenhardt as follows:

> If one assumes on the strength of their present stagnation that these peoples have regressed, it is obvious that their mentality cannot consequently sustain the idea of a Supreme Being, still less make explicit a recollection of the idea, if by chance any traces of it remain. If on the other hand, the claim is that these people are still primitive and on this side of their potential development, it is obvious that their mentality does not yet have the necessary vigour to understand the world in its unity and the universal supremacy of a God.[57]

It is difficult to miss the similarity in the manner the paradoxes are resolved by Hick and Goetz, for Goetz comments: "This only proves that the idea of God is not primarily philosophical, but religious."[58]

One may now turn to love. John Hick notes that "Goodness and love are generally treated as two further attributes of God. But in the New Testament God's goodness, love, and grace are all virtually synonymous, and the most characteristic of the three terms is love."[59] He further notes the well-known fact that the word used to denote the love of or for God is not *eros* ('desiring love') but *agape*. The kind of love denoted by the word *eros*

> is evoked by and depends upon the lovableness of its objects. He loves her because she is pretty, charming, cute. She loves him because he is handsome, manly, clever. Parents love their children because they are *their* children. However, when the New Testament speaks of God's love for mankind, it employs a different term, *agape*. Unlike *eros*, *agape* is unconditional and universal it its range. It is given to someone not because she or he has special characteristics, but simply because that person is *there* as a person. The nature of *agape* is to value a person in such ways as actively to seek his or her deepest welfare and fulfillment. It is in this sense that the New Testament speaks of God's love for mankind. When it is said, for example, that 'God is love' or that 'God so loved the world...,' the word used is *agape* and its cognates.[60]

The first point to note here is that love in the sense of *eros* is relevant from a primal perspective, for when God who loves, made all things, one of them was making love as "a cosmic correlate of home and universe." "Thus in the layout of Dogon villages in Africa, the outer door of the house is a phallus, its kitchen door a vagina, and the entire ground floor a woman on her back ready for sex, the ceiling is her male partner."[61] It becomes prurient

when "owing to the destructive influence of modern civilization, the meaning of the mythic background ceases to shape the cult performances. Fertility dances, for instance, begin to lose their total significance, and turn into exclusively erotic performances which apparently function as 'magical means' for the participant's erotic life."[62]

The idea of God as loving, it has been noticed in the case of some other non-Christian religions, is either not found or perhaps not expressed the same way as in Christianity, and is therefore not discussed the way it is in the Western philosophy of religion, as in the philosophies of other religions. Buddhism provides an interesting contrast here,[63] and so, in their own way, the primal religions. As John S. Mbiti explains in relation to the African primal religions:

> As for the love of God, there are practically no direct sayings that God loves. This is something reflected also in the daily lives of African peoples, in which it is rare to hear people talking about love. A person shows his love for another more through action than through words. So, in the same way, people experience the love of God in concrete acts and blessings; and they assume that He loves them, otherwise He would not have created them. Whereas manifestations of evil, such as sickness, barrenness, death, failure in undertakings and the like, are attributed to malicious human (and occasionally, spiritual) agents, the manifestations of good, such as health, begetting many children, fertility, wealth, plenty and the like, are attributed to God: they are the tokens of His love to mankind. People experience the love of God, even though they do not speak of it as though it were detached from His activities.[64]

However, even the Sky God does help: "This God is a God about whom they know nothing, who is called in to intervene when they are faced with questions about which they know nothing,"[65] and he also plays a 'pedagogic and moral role.'[66] There is also a version of the Sky God "active and intervening in a man's life."[67]

This discussion hitherto has been a preliminary skirmish. The real point is that on account of God being lodged at the centre of the mythic matrix of primal religion, God and his love and love for God can only be felt *through* it. Wilhelm Dupré uses the term *unio mythica* to depict this situation.

The intellectual refinements which surround this *unio mythica* are similar to those developed around *agape* in terms of its difference from *eros*, for instance. They are also richer in texture, considering the way Wilhelm Dupré develops the theme. He makes five observations in this regard: (1) the closer a culture is to its roots the more comprehensive the *unio mythica*; (2) the less fractured the *unio mythica* the greater the coincidence of the opposites; (3) the greater the consciousness of *unio mythica* the greater the divide between magic and religion; (4) the theistic outlook is implied in the *unio mythica*

because only in the union is the *mythos* actualized and thus transcended as mere content and (5) "although the discovery of the theogonic consciousness and the *unio mythica* (fundamental unity) reveals a basic autonomy of primitive religion," it is closely correlated to cultural processes.

> Being co-original with the process of hominization, primitive religion is not only influenced by this process but equally influences it. Its impact on the process of hominization thus becomes the final pattern of the realization of primitive religion and its transmutation into primitive religions and religious phenomena in general.[68]

Primal thought is familiar with the idea of the wrath of God. The inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego (a place made famous by Darwin and whose inhabitants are now extinct) spoke of Temaukel Asud and his wrath in relation to the Selk'nam tribe of nomadic hunters:

> "The One Above" knows what is happening here; he sees all the Selk'nam. He punishes people and then someone dies. The Selk'nam weep and reproach him; they say, "you above, you have killed this man."
>
> But Temaukel is the most powerful of all men. What he ordains, men must obey, for he is the owner of all. Otherwise, he will punish, and again someone will die. But "the one who lives in the sky" never dies; he is kushpin [spirit], he is always there.[69]

Similar beliefs prevail among the pygmies as well:

> He whom Imana (God) hates, dies; the soul leaves, taking with it the intelligence which never returns for him to be able to speak again. The body decays. Man walks everywhere with death; it is in his head, his chest, there is no place where it is not.
>
> The Mutwa (Pygmy) does not fear death. Why should he fear death since it is always with him? To die is to die, and you are finished. Imana keeps man from death, but you must keep yourself from other men and from the beasts of the forest.
>
> If the spirits attack you, sacrifice; if your tribe members are sick, carry a charm; if you are sick, take a medicine. If Imana is with you, you will be cured; if not, you will die.
>
> When we go out into the forest and pass near a sleeping lion, and near a snake biting the earth, and near a sleeping leopard, we have Imana with us. He protects us from evil beasts.
>
> But if Imana hates someone, then there is nothing which does not kill that man. A monkey will kill him, a goat will kill him. If Imana is with someone, no beast will defeat him, no spirit will defeat him, nothing will defeat him.[70]

The wrath of God when viewed in the context of God as good poses the usual problems for the primal peoples as for others.

It should be added, however, that the view of God as Good and as Loving in primal societies is multifaceted and possesses many dimensions. John S. Mbiti's summation of the African situation alone suffices to show how these basic attributes reflect not merely a unity in diversity but also unity in complexity. For instance, in relation to the Goodness of God, some primal societies such as the Akamba, Bacongo, Herero, Igbo and Ila, emphasize the positive aspect of the doing of good. The Ewe are also firm in their belief that 'he is good, for he has never withdrawn form us the good things that he gave us.' In other societies the negative dimension of goodness receives greater recognition, if one may put it that way. This consists of averting calamities, and providing that whose absence will lead to calamities. The Langi thus thank Him for the harvests; the Vugusu for prosperity and the Nandi for fertility. At some point, of course, the distinction between the positive and negative begins to overlap or even get blurred. Nevertheless, the association of goodness with God is so strong that the 'Barundi do not wish to thank Him since it is His right (significantly not their's) to do good things to them.' However, what happens when bad things happen to good primal people?

All societies find this a hard question to answer, including the primal. Some primal people simply accept it as an attribute of God. The Katanga peoples say, for instance, that God is 'the Father creator who creates and uncreates.' The Ila people similarly hold Him responsible for causing things to rot. Other societies introduce the element of God's disposition and depict Him as capable of displaying anger. Thus 'death, drought, floods, locusts and other natural calamities are interpreted as manifestations of His anger.' The Tonga and the Tiv include thunder and lightning as manifestations of God's anger.

What arouses God's wrath? The violations of moral and traditional practices are the usual suspects. The Barundi fear, for instance, that adultery arouses His anger. In fact, in dealing with the present issue in the context of primal religions three strands stand out. One is that "the majority of African people regard God as essentially good"; the second is that "they do not consider God to be intrinsically 'evil' as such," even when evil has to be confronted and the third is the recognition of God's will. This last dimension does appear to be a part of traditional Judeo-Christian theism but has been softened in modern times, as human beings succeeded in bending events increasingly to their will with the growth of science and technology. But so far as the primal societies in Africa are concerned, "a number of people consider God to have a will which governs the universe and the fortunes of mankind. When the Bambuti Pygmies fail to kill game in their expeditions,

they take this to be God's will against which they can do nothing. On the other hand, the Banyarwanda believe that through God's will does one find a wife (or husband), wealth, job or is restored to health. When planning to do something the Akamba add the words 'God willing.' Misfortunes, especially death, are accepted by some, such as the Gikuyu, Lugbara and Nuer, to be God's will, whatever other explanations may be advanced."[71] In other words, there is acceptance of the will of God but differences in the perception of the degree or extent of its immediate operation.

Holy

The Great Spirit, designated *Wakan Tanka* among the Lakota, for instance, carried with it a sense of the Holy. According to one account "It was the animating force of the universe, the common denominator of its oneness. The totality of these life-giving forces was called *Wakan Tanka*, 'great incomprehensibility.' *Wakan Tanka* was the sum of all that was considered mysterious, powerful, or sacred – equivalent to the basic meaning of the English word 'holy.'"[72] When Kenneth Oliver says: "The term Great Spirit is translated from *Wakan Tanka*, 'Big Holy.' We wonder what the word 'big' means, what the word *wakan* means, what does 'sacredness' mean?" he is wondering about the conflation of cause and effect.[73] The experience which Vine V. Deloria, Sr. recounts, conveys some idea of this Holiness and of one's encounter with it. He is talking about his grandfather who was "sixteen years old at the time."

> Finally, past midnight sometime, Grandfather started for home. When he got there and bent over to open the oval door to the tipi, he heard a voice to his left. It was not that of a human or an animal or a bird – of that he was perfectly sure. He went to bed, but was unable to sleep for a long time. Next day and for some time, maybe weeks, he worried and pondered about that strange voice and finally got over it – finally forgot all about it.
>
> Then by and by another year came around. It wasn't a time when the people were all assembled but there they were, camped somewhere – I don't know, Father didn't describe that. But my grandfather Francis, now seventeen, was fast asleep. He was a good sleeper, and suddenly he found himself awake. He sat right up, drew up his knees, and rested his arms on them. And he said, "What did I wake up for? Why, I never have done this before." He was sitting there, thoughtless, when the voice came again. And so he jumped up and went outdoors. He saw the moon. So he checked it, and then he recalled the month of the year. It wasn't January, it wasn't February, it wasn't the month that you get sore eyes from the glare of March snow. So it must have been April. And he tried to remember that moon.

> The next year he spent I would say a very attentive year trying to keep his experience in mind. So when it was once again getting near that time of year, he stayed up past midnight. I don't know how many nights, but finally the voice did come again. He was eighteen years old now. And with that third voice, Francis Deloria was convinced – or convinced himself – that it was the Great Spirit, or the Great Holy, or That Which Is Holy, calling him.[74]

The same is true of primal religions in Africa. John S. Mbiti writes:

> Concerning the holiness of God, little is said directly by African peoples as far as our records show. The Ila hold that God cannot be charged with an offence, since He is above the level of 'fault', 'failure', 'wrong' and 'unrighteousness.' In the eyes of the Yoruba, God is 'the pure King...Who is without blemish.' The concept of God's holiness is also indicated from the fact that many African peoples have strict rules in performing rituals directed to God. Sacrificial animals, for instance, have to be of one sacred colour, and priests or officiating elders must refrain from sexual intercourse and certain foods or activities before and after the ritual. These ritual formalities clearly show that people regard God as holy.[75]

Not the burning bush of Moses or the crackling coal of Luther or the fire of Pascal, something gentler but equally compelling. These passages may not compare with the vivid experience of Isaiah of the holy immensity of God as described in the following verse, but they do convey the primal sense of holy proximity.

> To whom then will you liken God,
> or what likeness compare with him?
> The idol a workman casts it,
> and a goldsmith overlays it with gold
> and casts for it silver chains.
> He who is impoverished chooses for an offering
> wood that will not rot;
> he seeks out a skillful craftsman
> to set up an image that will not move.
> Have you not known? Have you not heard?
> Has it not been told you from the beginning?
> Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
> It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
> and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
> who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
> and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;
> who brings princes to nought,
> and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing...
> To whom then will you compare me,
> that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

Lift up your eyes on high and see:
who created these?[76]

The idea of the Holy,[77] as pertaining to God in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is associated with religious experience per se by Rudolf Otto in his famous work, *Das Heilige* (1917). Charles Long, a well-known scholar of primal religion, demonstrates how this major concept in religious studies is affected, when evidence from primal religions is taken into account. Charles Long begins by noting that "Though in primitive religion varieties of gods, tricksters, malevolent beings, fetishes and magico-religious practices are met with; the comprehensive reality is the reality of the sacred, the reality defined by Otto as 'the holy.' The religious attitude engendered by the encounter with this reality is 'numinous', which may be analyzed into two dialectical feelings: the *mysterium tremendum*, the element of awe and dread; and the *mysterium fascinans*, the feeling of fascination, wonder, and attraction."[78]

He, then goes on to add that: "It is possible, however, to analyze the sacred into more specific categories.[79] He then identifies four such categories in the following passage, which is excerpted in full, despite its length, on account of its innovative character:

> **The Sacred as Powerful** – The sacred always manifests itself as power, as seen in the notion of *mana* among the Melanesians and in similar conceptions, such as the *orenda* of the Iroquois and *wakanda* of the Sioux. Though *mana* is often understood to be impersonal – in the sense of its arbitrariness – it always manifests itself in some person or thing, endowing that person or thing with the efficacious power that resides in the sacred. This power is often identified as the "vital" or life force in all living things. Among the Melanesians *mana* may refer to influence, strength, fame, or anything regarded as extraordinary. However, men and things possess this power only because it has been given to them by more powerful beings.
>
> **The Sacred as Dangerous** – The sacred is dangerous because it is powerful. This character is expressed by the Polynesian term *tabu*, meaning that limits are set about the sacred person or object. Among primitive people all ceremonial activity, the sexual life, the person of king or chief, and certain times and seasons bring into operation an elaborate set of tabus which give recognition to the sacred power manifested in these dimensions of man's existence.
>
> **The Sacred as Mystery** – The sacred is mysterious because it is the manifestation of that which is extraordinary, that which cannot be known by ordinary means. Religious knowledge is revealed by the manifestation of the sacred in a specific form to a specific person or people. The totem animal of the Australians, though commonplace in the Australian environment, is at the same time uncanny and unique. It is mysterious precisely because its relation to the totem group is more than a pragmatic economic relationship.

> **The Sacred as Secret** – Closely related is the notion that the sacred is secret. The literal sense of the term, *churinga*, applied by the central Australians to their sacred objects and likewise used more abstractly to denote mystic power (as when a man is said to be "full of *churinga*"), is "secret." This is symptomatic of the esotericism that is a striking mark of Australian and indeed of all primitive religion, with its insistence on initiation and its strictly enforced reticence concerning traditional lore and proceedings. The religious system of a particular tribe may be based on a sacred tribal secret; more esoteric secrets are known by smaller groups within the tribe. There are secrets that are known only by men, others known only by particular groups of men, others known only by those who follow a certain occupation.[80]

Considerable ground has been covered in this chapter, both in the sense of diversity of source-material drawn upon to elucidate the primal vision of God and in the sense of the various kinds of comparison instituted between these and the Judeo-Christian conceptions of God. It might, then, be useful to pause and summarize the major conclusions at this stage.

(1) It is obvious, of course, that "the notion of God is not exclusive to any one civilization, but is present with variations in all of them."[81] The comparison of the notions of God in primal religions and the present-day philosophy of religion highlights the fact that "Two aspects of the question must be distinguished: the existence of the idea of God, and its degree of vitality in a given environment."[82] The primal perspective causes us to focus on the question of this vitality in a major way, in a way we would not but for having surveyed the material provided by it.

(2) Belief in one God is universalistic by implication. However, the way in which this universalism unfolds is certainly distinct and virtually opposite in manner, in the Judeo-Christian and primal religion. If Judeo-Christian monotheistic universalism is understood and characterized as "uniform" in nature, then the universalism of primal religions may be characterised as 'differential', following Dupre, who writes:

Conclusion

> The dynamic reality of religion in primitive cultures is obvious when we consider its differential universality. Although the interpretation of religion as a genetic phenomenon implies its universality, it is not simply that of concepts and clearly defined symbols, but of existence. Like existence itself, it is deeply involved in a process of selection and specification.... The universality that results from these conditions differs, like man himself, from situation to situation. At the same time it maintains the identity of the relation that brings it into existence. It is influenced by various factors, yet is not constituted by them. In a word, it is differential. Consequently, differential universality is not just a description, but a basic pattern, in which

> primitive religion emerges and presents itself in the religious phenomena of primitive cultures.[83]

(3) The words monotheism, theism and deism must be employed carefully in comparing Judeo-Christianity and primal religions. We have by and large followed the usage so clearly spelled out by John Hick. However, there are others who would use deism for what it stands for "in the words of Diderot,...a concept of God which has no religious reality"[84]; use theism to mean "a belief in God which is not simply a belief, but has an effective and direct influence on a man's daily life,"[85] and who would not use the word monotheism in the context of primal religions "not as a concession to a conviction of our absolute superiority, but because monotheism presupposes an awareness of certain problems and an elucidation of certain ideas of which the primitive has not yet had reason to catch even a glimpse."[86] Unless, of course one intends the realization that "If we call the complex system that indicates absolute transcendence and all-presentness of the divine person *mono*theism and if we name the systematic restriction of the divine hypostases *poly*theism, we can also say that the concrete situation is that of a relative monotheism or relative polytheism. Both are identical so far as they are broken representations of the unbroken reality of primitive religion."[87]

Some rethinking of the concept of theism itself may also be called for, as Evans-Pritchard points out in *Nuer Religion*: "a theistic religion need not be either monotheistic or polytheistic. It may be both. It is a question of the level, or situation, of thought rather than of exclusive types of thought. On one level Nuer religion may be regarded as monotheistic, at another level as polytheistic; and it can also be regarded at other levels as totemistic or fetishistic. These conceptions of spiritual activity are not incompatible. They are rather different ways of thinking of the numinous at different levels of experience...At no level of thought and experience is Spirit thought of as something altogether different from God."[88]

(4) The relationship of theism to the form of culture in which it flourishes, whether it be primal or modern, may need to be investigated – a need to which the material from primal religion sensitizes us. Amidst the Turko-Mongols we note that

> In spite of his great transcendence, we have seen Tengri use various means to reach out to man: the commands he gives, the protection he grants, the dreams he sends, and the light which falls on the earth. Is the reverse true and can man reach out towards God? The practice of prayer and sacrificial ceremonies already allow us to reply in the affirmative. But man attains God in a much more concrete way: Tengri is, after death, the very refuge of man. From the moment earthly life begins, the Sky (Tengri) is materially accessible, and therefore still more, mystically, material accession being simply the representation of a spiritual accession.[89]

Similarly, "Among the Hamitic and Hamitoid herdsmen and, to a certain extent, among the Nilotic races in Oriental Africa, a very pronounced bedouin-hunter element complicates the pastoral culture: but the religion is the same religion of the Sky God. It differs from Tengrism in its lack of creation and cosmological myths, but on the other hand, is even richer in sacrifices and especially in long prayers resembling the Litanies and Psalms."[90]

So the question of the relationship between theism and a particular way of life keeps arising and remains open.[91]

(5) Philosophy of religion tends to attach much significance to God as a creator. Primal religions, however, sometimes seem to suggest that although human beings are "accustomed to link the idea of God closely to cosmology, this has not been to its advantage"[92] in some primal accounts. One wonders whether the fact that the figure of the devil has receded from contemporary theism has anything to do with it.[93] For although the story of the Sky God with a "progressive withdrawal culminating in a form of deism"[94] is the standard account,

> Yet another theme, a characteristic of the American-Arctic-Pastoral zone, may serve as an approach to the understanding of the idea of the Sky God: the Adversary of God in Creation. In America he is identified with the coyote. He is never absent from the creation myths, except perhaps among the most primitive tribes of California. He is the hero of humorous stories similar in spirit to the burlesque tales of imps and devils of the Christian Middle Ages. In America he exists only in myths and no activity is attributed to him in real life. It is the same among the stone age Arctic peoples of Asia where he is, however, more essentially evil. Among the Asian herdsmen, however, he is not confined to stories, but has a constant influence on life. The shamans even offer him sacrifices. The idea of the Adversary is still linked with creation myths: once one tries to show that everything is created by the Father (Above in heaven), one is faced with the problem of evil and disorder, or what appears as such. This problem, inseparable from the inner contradiction of man himself, leads to a kind of dualism.[95]

(6) Whatever the merits of relating God to creation, the survey of Judeo-Christian and primal material makes it clear that

> Creation myths can point the direction towards an understanding of the phenomenon of theism. Even if we wished to reduce them to the category of myths of origins, as some writer attempts to do from time to time, we should at least have to make them a special group, because they contain an irreducible factor: the idea of creation itself. On the other hand, this factor should not be abstracted and speculated upon in isolation without regard for the form of the myths. By this we do not mean anthropomorphism, nor even zoomorphism, these are minor details arising out of the symbolism. It is this

symbolic character itself which must not be overlooked if one is to grasp the meaning of the myths.[96]

(7) The movement from theism to deism both in primal and modern religious thought may be coincidental but certainly invites exploration.

(8) The question of primal religions being influenced by world religions in this area is a significant one, and in the assessment of this influence word, form and function may have to be distinguished. "For example, among the primitive races of India: 'Now is the hour of Bhagwan, the Gods are powerless, and men turn to Bhagwan for help. From time to time Bhagwan sends us such epidemics to remind us of him.' "[97] Bhagavān is the name for God in high Hinduism.[98]

Perhaps the following comment of Joseph Goetz, S.J., sounds the right note in this regard. "A connection does exist between the beliefs of primitive peoples and Christian doctrine, but the links seem to be more living, more human and at the same time more divine, and less extrinsic to the normal life of the spirit. For this reason we ourselves feel justified in having attempted to explore beyond the frontiers of ethnology"[99] – into that of philosophy.

(9) The problem of idolatry, which looms so large in the discussion of some non-Western religions, is as such absent in primal religions in general. No doubt masks and other representations exist but it has been noted about the place where they abound, namely Africa, that "The 'idols' against which some observers used to rage, were often simply carvings of worshippers or lay figures"[100] and "despite the proliferation of sculpture" it "has clearly been felt that God can no more be depicted in visible form than he can be enclosed in a building for worship."[101] It would be a mistake, at least in some cases, to attribute their absence of idolatry to the remoteness of the deity. "The Yoruba make no symbols or representations or images of Olodumare nor do they dedicate temples to him. This is not only because he is high and lifted up and far above all human beings but also because he is *so real* that one addresses to him little arrow prayers, prayers tossed off as one would shoot an arrow up towards God as one goes about one's daily business. God, Olodumare, is somehow present in all that a man does. There is no point in trying to perform great sacrifices or religious ceremonies in connection with him, he is real and present."[102]

(10) The category of the Holy is applied to God in the philosophy of religion. Four other specific categories of the numinous were identified by Charles Long on the basis of the primal religion tradition. Given the fluidity of the concepts of God and the sacred in the context of not just primal religions,[103] but even religion in general, the possible application of these specific categories to God may not be lacking in theological interest.

CHAPTER III

ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Several arguments have been adduced to establish the existence of God. It will be useful, in the interest of clarity, to discuss them under distinct headings.

The Ontological Argument

The ontological argument is associated with the name of Anselm and is deduced from the formula that God is "*a being than which nothing greater can be conceived,*" where by greater is meant more 'perfect.'

The two clarifications of this statement, which John Hick offers at the very outset, become relevant in the context of primal religions. The first is that "by 'greater' Anselm means more perfect, rather than spatially bigger."[1] And the second is that "the idea of the most perfect conceivable being is different from the idea of the most perfect being there is. The ontological argument could not be founded on the latter notion, for although it is true by definition that the most perfect being that there is exists, there is no guarantee that this being is what Anselm means by God."[2]

It was noted earlier how the primal concept of the transcendence of God is spatial rather than temporal.[3] So the spatial interpretation of the Anselm argument would be more relevant in a primal context. Moreover, although for Anselm the claim that the most perfect being there is exists is not sufficient proof that it is God, this seems to be the prevailing view in primal religions. John S. Mbiti writes:

> It is, however, in spatial terms that people more readily conceive of God's transcendence. God is thought of as dwelling far away in the sky, or 'above', beyond the reach of men. Obviously the sky in its great immensity invites people to gaze in it, both with their eyes and imagination. Practically all

> African peoples associate God with the Sky, in one way or another. Some have myths telling of how men came from the sky; or of how God separated from men and withdrew Himself into the sky, whence nobody could directly reach Him.

He goes on to say:

> The concept of God's transcendence is summarized well in a Bacongo saying, that 'He is made by no other; no one beyond Him is.' There cannot be, and there is no 'beyond' God: He is the most abundant reality of being, lacking no completeness. He transcends all boundaries; He is omnipresent everywhere and at all times. He even defies human conception and description; He is simply 'the Unexplainable' as the Ngombe like to call Him. Ontologically He is transcendent in that all things were made by Him, whereas He is self-existent. In status He is 'beyond' spiritual beings, the spirits, men and natural objects and phenomena. In power and knowledge, He is supreme.[4]

First Form of the Argument

In the first version of Anselm's argument, a distinction is drawn between something which exists only in the imagination and something which exists in reality. If one were to conceive of two situations, in which a perfect being existed only in conception and another in which it *also* existed in reality, then obviously the latter is more perfect than the former. Therefore, if God is 'that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought', then God must belong to this latter category.

The thinking in relation to God in primal religions has hinged not on the distinction between *conception* and *reality* but between *activity* and *passivity*, between His or Her being active and being inactive. Although one might be inclined to argue that an *active* God is superior to an *inactive* God, the primal religious tradition typically speaks of *deus otiosus*, rendering the application of Anselm's argument problematical. Just a God who can be and is, is greater than who can be and is not; one could assume that a God who can do and does, is more 'perfect' than who can do and does not. The expectation, however, is by and large reversed in primal religion. The key doesn't fit, or if it does, it has to be turned the other way.

Second Form of the Argument

The second form of Anselm's argument moves from the issue of existence of God to God's necessary existence. In other words, between a thing which exists and which does not exist, other things remaining the same, that which

exists is greater than that which does not exist and that which can exist at all times greater than that which does not so exist.

"Broadly speaking, African thought forms are more concrete."[5] With that in mind, I might wish to frame the issue as follows: if a God exists with a cult or does not exist with a cult, then existence with a cult would presumably be more consistent with the God's supremacy, given the fact of existence. It turns out, in the case of Supreme God in West African religion that, while in the Christian context, God is the 'highest' article of religion, and practised as such, it is not in the forefront of practised West African religion, whatever lip-service may be paid to the creator, in practice, worship, and morals, He may not even be first among equals. This may or may not, be degeneration from a primitive monotheism. Recognition of the fact is an important matter."[6]

Anselm's arguments, when cast in the concrete modes of primal thought, seem to produce some surprising results, but would it be fair to do so? Consider, for instance, the following summary statement:

> From this it follows that God is pre-eminently great and supreme. Many societies like the Akan, Baluba, Ngoni, Tonga and others, speak of Him as 'the Great One', or 'Great God', or 'the Great King,' or the 'surpassingly great Spirit.' The main Zulu name for God, *Unkulunkulu*, carries with it the sense of 'Great-great-One' and the same name is used by neighbouring peoples, such as the Ndebele for whom it means 'the Greatest of the great.' The attributes of transcendence and self-existence also point in this same direction of the supremacy and pre-eminence of God.[7]

What would expressions like 'the Great-great-One' or 'the Greatest of the Great' boil down to philosophically if not to Anselm's arguments?

Criticism of the Argument

It was noted earlier how, in primal thought, it is not time but space which provides a primary category of thought in the present context. It was further observed that the extension of Anselm's argument in terms of space rather than time meant that the idea of *infinity* must replace that of *aseity*. However, although thus modified, Anselm's argument remains open to challenge even in its primal version. To appreciate this challenge one must begin by taking a look at the criticism directed at Anselm's classical formulation. It is not without interest here to begin by noting that

> In introducing the ontological argument, Anselm refers to the psalmist's "fool" who says in his heart, "There is no God." Even such a person, he says, possesses the idea of God as the greatest conceivable being; and when we unpack the implications of this idea we see that such a being must actually

> exist. The first important critic of the argument, Gaunilon, a monk at Marmoutiers in France and a contemporary of Anselm's, accordingly entitled his reply *In Behalf of the Fool*. He claims that Anselm's reasoning would lead to absurd conclusions if applied in other fields, and he sets up a supposedly parallel ontological argument for the most perfect island. Gaunilon spoke of the most perfect of islands rather than (as he should have done) of the most perfect conceivable island; but his argument could be rephrased in terms of the latter idea. Given the idea of such as island, by using Anselm's principle we can argue that unless it exists in reality it cannot be the most perfect conceivable island![8]

The idea of introducing the fool here is not at all foolish. In fact it possesses a parallel on the primal side. For once God is made infinite, then the question of reconciling God with creation arises. Although the "claim that all primitive peoples call their Sky God Creator is false,"[9] yet it is equally true that many do. Those who do not in fact may be displaying their philosophic wisdom (contra Anselm as applied to *deus otiosus*) because "the idea to link God closely to cosmology," may not be to "its advantage" for "once one tries to show that everything is created by the Father (Above in Heaven) one is faced with the problem of evil and disorder, or what appear as such. This problem, inseparable from the inner contradiction of man himself, leads to a kind of dualism which is made explicit only at the end of the curve, for among the more primitive groups there is always a moment when the myth emphasizes the radical impotence of Coyote [Devil], and shows him compelled to recognize it himself; they sometimes seek to explain their origin as a cast-off of the work of creator."[10] The point to note from our point of view is that "although the trickster participates in the cosmic design, he is not a God or supernatural creature. His accomplishments are often due to his folly, which may be seen as the source of his wisdom."[11]

The First Cause and Cosmological Arguments

Another set of arguments for the existence of God are associated with Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274). His arguments may be summarized as follows: "Aquinas's proofs start from some general feature of the world around us and argue that there could not be a world with this particular characteristic unless there were also the ultimate reality which we call God. The first Way argues from the fact of change to a Prime Mover; the second from causation to a First Cause; the third from contingent beings to a Necessary Being; the fourth from degrees of value to Absolute Value; and the fifth from evidences of purposiveness in nature to a Divine Designer."[12]

In the context of primal religions, one can relate most directly to the third argument.

> Aquinas's third Way, known as the argument from the contingency of the world, and often monopolizing the name *the cosmological argument*, runs as follows. Everything in the world about us is contingent – that is, it is true of each item that it might not have existed at all or might have existed differently. The proof of this is that there was a time when it did not exist. The existence of this printed page is contingent upon the prior activities of trees, lumberjacks, transport workers, paper manufacturers, publishers, printers, author, and others, as well as upon the contemporary operation of a great number of chemical and physical laws; and each of these in turn depends upon other factors. Everything points beyond itself to other things. Saint Thomas argues that if everything were contingent, there would have been a time when nothing existed. In this case, nothing could ever have come to exist, for there would have been no causal agency. Since there are things in existence, there must therefore be something that is not contingent, and this we call God.[13]

This cosmological argument has been presented by Aquinas in two versions: one which includes and another which excludes time. John Hick has suggested that the inclusion of the temporal element weakens the argument. In fact he says explicitly: "Aquinas's reference to a hypothetical time when nothing existed seems to weaken rather than strengthen his argument, for there might be an infinite series of finite contingent events overlapping in the time sequence so that no moment occurs that is not occupied by any of them. However, modern Thomists generally omit this phase of the argument (as indeed Aquinas himself does in another book). If we remove the reference to time, we have an argument based upon the logical connection between a contingent world (even if this should consist of an infinite series of events) and its noncontingent ground."[14]

Thus he prefers the cosmological argument when advanced without the time element included in it. With the time element left out of the argument, it may be presented with the help of the following analogy:

> One writer points as an analogy to the workings of a watch. The movement of each separate wheel and cog is accounted for by the way in which it meshes with an adjacent wheel. Nevertheless, the operation of the whole system remains inexplicable until we refer to something else outside it, namely, the spring. In order for there to be a set of interlocking wheels in movement, there must be a spring; and in order for there to be a world of contingent realities, there must be a contingent ground for their existence. Only a self-existent reality, containing in itself the source of its own being, can constitute an ultimate ground of the existence of anything else. Such an ultimate ground is the "necessary being" that we call God.[15]

In the case of primal religions, however, it might be wiser to give weight to both the versions. The primal approach to time is different from the Western.[16] We noted earlier how the word primal may carry the connotation of not being only temporally but also ontologically closer to the source or origin, i.e. the Real. This is confirmed by John S. Mbiti's analysis of time in terms of *Zamani* and *Sasa* concepts of time, which tilts the scale towards the past rather than the future.[17] This is further confirmed by the concept of *Dreamtime* especially among the Australian aborigines, however interpreted. The distant past is paradigmatic in primal religions in such a way that the possibility of "an infinite series of finite contingent events overlapping in time sequence" may leave them unimpressed.

Thus the cosmological argument, with time included within it, works well with primal religions; although the version which excludes time works well with them also. On this point the following comments by Westermann are helpful:

> The African's God is *deus incertus* and a *deus remotus*: there is always an atmosphere of indefiniteness about him. If the European in his questionings concerning him goes into details, the reply will be: "We do not know." ...He is God of the thoughtful, not of the crowd, of people whose mature observation, personal experience, and primitive philosophy have led them to postulate a central and ultimate power who is the *originator of everything existing* and in whose hands the universe is safe: it is in sayings of these people that sometimes the figure of God assumes features of a truly personal and purely divine Supreme Being.[18]

The Design (or Teleological) Argument

This argument has been among the most durable as a proof of the existence of God. It "occurs in philosophical literature from Plato's *Timaeus* onwards" and "is still in active commission."[19] It is famously illustrated with the example of a watch used by William Paley (1843-1805).

> Suppose that while walking in a desert place I see a rock lying on the ground and ask myself how this object came to exist. I can properly attribute its presence to chance, meaning in this case the operation of such natural forces as wind, rain, heat, frost, and volcanic action. However, if I see a watch lying on the ground, I cannot reasonably account for it in a similar way. A watch consists of a complex arrangement of wheels, cogs, axles, springs, and balances, all operating accurately together to provide a regular measurement of the lapse of time. It would be utterly implausible to attribute the formation and assembling of these metal parts into a functioning machine to the chance operation of such factors as wind and rain. We are obliged to postulate an intelligent mind which is responsible for the phenomenon.[20]

It is worth noting, as Paley points out, that even if we have never seen a watch or the watch does not work the argument is not negated because the basic point is the unconscious (even if unsuccessful or invisible) teleology is meaningless. But not for Hume who countered (1) that even objects like vegetables and crustaceans, display design; (2) that a watch is a part of the universe and the argument applies conclusion based on a part to the whole and (3) even if conscious design is admitted there could be many designers or a poor designer so that the one wise God of Christianity does not necessarily follow. This would still hold irrespective of whether there was a hierarchy among the Gods. “When Rattray asked an Ashanti priest why he did not worship just one God and leave out the lesser powers, the old man replied: ‘We in Ashanti dare not worship the Sky God alone, or the Earth Goddess alone, or any one spirit. We have to protect ourselves against, and use when we can, the spirits of all things in the sky and upon the earth...If I see four or five Europeans, I do not make much of one alone, and ignore the rest, lest they too may have power to hate me.’” [21]

The recent experience of a colleague who visited Africa turns out to be fortuitously extremely helpful in developing this argument in the context of primal religions. The colleague records his visit to a volcano in East Africa called Ol Doinyo Lengai.[22] It is worth recalling that, like the famous Paley’s watch (so called after the person who made the argument famous), the colleague had not seen the volcano before and had failed to reach it on earlier tries, somewhat analogous to Paley’s watch being non-functional. His experience may be described in his own words:

> Words cannot describe the crater and its activity. Photographs too, I have discovered, are inadequate. A flat, nearly colorless moon-like landscape, half a mile in diameter, with dozens of small cones and craters in varying stages of growth and disintegration. What I am most haunted by in retrospect is the smell of sulphur, seeping out of wide cracks in the earth – and the sounds, as of storm surf crashing on a beach, the sounds of black molten rock hurling itself up from thirty miles below the earth’s surface, crashing against the underside of the most active cone, spurting up into the air, flowing across the crater floor. There was for me an unprecedented sense of being in the physical presence of the raw energy that produced the universe.[23]

The question it raised for him was an interesting one. It was *not* whether only God could have “designed” such a remarkable phenomenon. In fact the question would have left Hume unimpressed. The question he asks is: “What did God have in mind when he allowed us *homo sapiens* to happen in the midst of these cosmic processes?”[24]

It seems to me that this is the question the primal philosopher would have asked: *not proof of what but proof for what*? The colleague, however, had to

work his way to the primal question *through* the philosophy of religion. He "unexpectedly found emerging, from deep in memory, fragments of old childhood psalms,"[25]

> O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!
> …
> When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou has established;
> What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him? (Ps. 8:1, 3-4)
> …
> The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein;
> For he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.
> Who shall ascent the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?
> He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully.
> He will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of his salvation. (Ps. 24:1-5)[26]

Thanks to his background in comparative religion he also recalled sentiments expressed in the Qur'ān. He goes on to say:

> Consider, for example, what the Qur'ān has to say. It is full of passages like this (16.10-18; A.J. Arberry translation):
> "It is He who sends down to you out of heaven water of which you have to drink, and of which trees, for you to pasture your herds, and thereby He brings forth for you crops, and olives, and palms, and vines, and all manner of fruit.
> Surely in that is a sign for a people who reflect.
> And he subjected to you the night and the day, and the sun and the moon; and the stars are subjected by His command.
> Surely in that are signs for a people who understand.
> And that which He has multiplied for you in the earth of diverse hues.
> Surely in that is a sign for a people who remember."[27]

He assessed the situation then as follows:

> Philosophers call the line of thought presented here the argument from design: the orderliness of the created world implies an architect of that order, conventionally called God. But the Qur'anic emphasis is not so much on the nature of God as it is on the nature of human beings. *It is they (i.e., we) who have the unique capacity to remember, to understand, to reflect upon the extraordinary fact of the universe*. It is the wonder of human beings, the Sunil Kapurs and the Saudamanis and all the rest of us that is here being celebrated, not the existence of the universe as an inert, impersonal entity.[28]

From this it is but a step to the primal philosophical question: whom is it designed for rather than who designed it?

How philosophical assumptions influence our perception is illustrated by the direction in which the question is taken. The earlier view saw the primal cultures conceiving of the cosmos in terms of themselves and their own habitat, in accordance with the principle or *homo mensura* "he makes the panorama of nature his mirror and reflexion, and so comes eventually to self-revelation."[29] The universe is then seen as an extension of the habitat, a "circular plane surmounted by a hemispherical roof." But the metaphorical horizon is extended further:

> But the conceptual completion of the frame of the world is only a step to its endowment with moral values. The sky, as the source of light and warmth, becomes the giver of life, strength, goodness and righteousness; personified, it is the Heavenly Father of all things. The earth, as the bringer forth of life and nourishment, becomes the Great Mother, spouse of the lord of heaven; while within her dark body are concealed the pre-natal and post-mortem powers of the unborn and the buried – the beginnings and the ends of fate. The dark under world, too, is the source of all that is noxious and deadly, and hence the permanent abode of things evil. This is the primitive symbolism, but it still colours our thought and forms the very substance of our expression in the whole realm of moral philosophy.[30]

Strikingly, in more recent writings, this perspective has been *reversed*, in the light of greater familiarity with primal modes of thought:

> Commonly the home symbolizes a cosmic order, as exemplified by the tents of the prerevolutionary Mongol Buriats. The Buriats divided their dwellings into four sections: the south portion from the door to the hearth was the low-status half; that from the hearth back, the high-status half. Each half was then again divided, the west side being male and ritually pure, the east, female and ritually impure. Therefore male visitors would stay in the southwest quadrant, female in the southeast. The seat of honor for the host and high-status guest always rested in the northwest sector. Even objects were categorized in this way; valuables and hunting equipment, for example, were male, household utensils female.[31]

So the "argument by design" has to be rephrased to include the telling question: whose design? In the mind of God or in the mind of Man? A consideration of the following passage suggests that the question will just not go away.

> Most Native American cultures saw similar cosmic correlations, leading them to characterize their dwellings as both temple and house. For the Plains Indians, the floor of the tipi represented the earth, the walls the sky, and the poles the paths linking earth and humanity to the sky and Wakantanka ("the

> great mystery"). A small altar of bare earth behind the fireplace, often with sod and roots removed and the earth pulverized and swept clean, represented Mother Earth. Sweet grass, cedar, or sage were burned here as incense to the spirits.[32]

The Moral Argument

Belief in God has been closely, though not invariably, associated with belief in morality. This has led to the identification of the moral argument, which is presented by John Hick in two forms.

First Form

Several lines of reasoning converge to produce this argument, so that it may be "presented as a logical inference from objective moral laws to a divine Law Giver; or from the objectivity of moral values or of values in general to a transcendent Ground of Values; or again, from the fact of conscience to a God whose 'voice' conscience is."[33]

This first form of the argument itself can be presented in two primal garbs.

Joseph Goetz has presented this argument in one primal garb as follows:

> The absorption of man by the techniques and productive work of agriculture does not completely stifle the *elementary experience of conscience*, which is an awareness that no force in the world can place man out of reach of the direct influence of God who still makes himself felt even in the usage of things produced by man. It is because animism, and even biocosmology do not account for all human experiences, and because tribal religions do not express all that man undergoes in his innermost life, that men give themselves this necessary complement of the thought of God.[34]

However, it is possible to look at God as, at bottom, not merely the source of moral life but life itself. The argument in this garb loses some of its moral force but remains minimally moral in the sense that God remains the last recourse.

> The distant god (*deus otiosus*) of specialized cultures is no more a philosophical idea than the idea of God itself. Men who have reflected on the nature of the universe from animism through polytheism, and especially from biocosmology (which, as we shall see, is the other side of the coin in agrarian religions) have not arrived at the idea of the Creator, but at that of an eternal cyclic world of which the gods are a part. Why then should they retain the useless supplement of the celestial god? Is it because cosmic immanentism is not an adequate answer to the principle of sufficient reason?

> In theory the answer is yes, but in practice these cultures have answers enough and to spare....[however]...In the last analysis, it is he alone who disposes of life, and so once again the essential attribute of the Sky God – the supreme field of life – is clearly underlined. Life, is, moreover, the only reality which actually evades man's grasp. He only sets its conditions, but it infinitely surpasses him who shares in it. The profoundest thinking of the agrarian cultures has made it an absolute – the absolute in the universe.[35]

The argument is, however, open to the same criticisms levelled against it in the modern philosophy of religion, namely, that the "basic assumption of all arguments of this kind is that moral values are not capable of naturalistic explanation in terms of human needs, desires and ideals, self-interest, the structure of human nature or human society, or in any other way that does not involve appeal to the Supernatural. But to make such an assumption is to beg the question. Thus, an essential premise of the inference from axiology to God is in dispute, and from the point of view of the naturalistic skeptic nothing has been established."[36]

Second Form

John Hick then turns to a second form of the argument and according to him: "The second kind of moral argument is not open to the same objection, for it is not strictly a proof at all. It consists of the claim that anyone seriously committed to respect moral values as exercising a sovereign claim upon his or her life must thereby implicitly believe in the reality of a transhuman source and basis for these values, which religion calls God. Thus, Immanuel Kant argues that both immortality and the existence of God are 'postulates' of the moral life, i.e., beliefs which can legitimately be affirmed as presuppositions by one who recognizes duty as rightfully laying upon one an unconditional claim."[37]

John Hick finds this line of argument reasonable up to a point. For he goes on to say:

> It seems to the present writer that so long as this contention is not overstated it has a certain limited validity. To recognize moral claims as taking precedence over all other interests is, implicitly, to believe in a reality of some kind, other than the natural world, that is superior to oneself and entitled to one's obedience. This is at least a move in the direction of belief in God, who is known in the Judaic-Christian tradition as the supreme moral reality. But it cannot be presented as a proof of God's existence, for the sovereign authority of moral obligation can be questioned; and even if moral values are acknowledged as pointing toward a transcendent ground, they cannot be said to point all the way to the infinite, omnipotent, self-existent, personal creator who is the object of biblical faith.[38]

The evidence from primal religions suggests caution in following through with this argument as a proof for the existence of God for two reasons. (1) John Hick cited Immanuel Kant in support, and Kant is known for demonstrating, through the 'conceptual device of the categorical imperative' that one could presuppose the existence of a "set of universal moral principles," and, even God, as mediating our experience of the universe. However, while it might be a valid Kantian *a priori* that the "categorical imperative" involves moral principles, can we go on from there to assume "the existence of a set of universal moral principles"? Why not "diverse" moral principles? Anthropological studies seem to demonstrate the existence of both: (1) of principles performing function; (2) *and* of diverse content of these principles when it comes to forms. [39] In fact, the anthropological argument for moral relativism is based on the assumption that the *a priori* is not "human" but "culture-bound." Next, the meaning of the word "supreme" has to be understood with care in primal religions, and especially in the present context. "It needs to be considered in what sense God is held to be 'supreme.' Is it merely so in legend, or in practice and worship? The word 'supreme' is easily comprehensible in European theology, but it may be actually misleading to transfer our ideas into the African hierarchy. God the Father is supreme in Christian theology. He could not be removed from the faith without undermining the whole structure; belief, worship, and morals are all finally dependent upon Him, and He could not be relegated to an inferior station. It would be harder to assert that this holds good in West Africa, either among the Akan or the Yoruba."[40]

The Universalist Argument

Another proof in evidence of the existence of God may be based on the widespread belief in the existence of God, so widespread as to be virtually universal. In the Western philosophy of religion this has rarely been urged as a proof, except to the extent that it might be identified as a component of natural theology.[41] Philosophy of religion, however, has tended to distance itself from natural theology.[42] Other religious philosophies have been less reluctant to do so. If a Hindu thinker can propose a *negative* proof of God's existence on the basis that "no anti-theist has so far proved the non-existence of God,"[43] then surely the conclusion drawn by John S. Mbiti, on the bases of his study of nearly 300 peoples from all over Africa in his *Concepts of God in Africa*, that "In all these societies, without a single exception, people have a notion of God"[44] needs to be given serious consideration. It is said: "Obi Nkyere Abofra Onyame: 'No one shows a child Onyame [the sky].' The name means both God and Sky."[45]

One could, of course, object that the veracity of a statement does not depend on the multiplicity of its believers. Once it was a widespread belief that the earth was flat, but that does not, nor did it, prove that fact. The point is well taken but may need to be modified. To claim that the earth exists and the claim that it is flat are two distinct claims. The first is right, the second is not. To which of these is the claim of the *existence* of God on the basis of widespread belief properly analogous? If it parallels the first rather than the second claim then it does deserve serious consideration.

The Experiential Argument

There is, finally, the argument by experience to be considered. Some people, specially mystics, have claimed special knowledge of God through direct experience. There are, of course, all kinds of difficulties associated with this argument but it is important to note that material pertinent to this line of argument also exists in the primal religions. Wilhelm Dupré, for instance, cites the following example of a "vision, which reminds one involuntarily of Exodus 3:4 ff ":

> 'I was hunting...All along the journey there I had been agitated and was constantly startled without knowing why. Suddenly I saw him standing under the drooping branches of a big steppe tree. He was standing there erect. His club was braced against the ground beside him, his hand he held on the hilt. He was tall and light-skinned, and his hair nearly descended to the ground behind him. His whole body was painted, and on the outer side of his legs were broad red stripes. His eyes were exactly like two stars. He was very handsome. I recognized at once that it was he. Then I lost all courage. My hair stood on end, and my knees were trembling. I put my gun aside, for I thought to myself that I should have to address him, but I could not utter a sound because he was looking at me unwaveringly. Then I lowered my head in order to get hold of myself and stood thus for a long time. When I had grown somewhat calmer, I raised my head. He was still standing and looking at me. Then I pulled myself together and walked several steps toward him, then I could not go any further for my knees gave way. I again remained standing for a long time, then lowered my head and tried again to regain composure. When I raised my eyes again, he had already turned away and was slowly walking through the steppe...'[46]

CHAPTER IV

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

There was probably never a time when belief in God was not challenged in one form or another, even if only to set the stage for its vindication, as in the Book of Job. However, it may be true to say that, for several centuries prior to the rise of the modern western civilization, the prevailing intellectual climate was noticeably suffused with belief in God in some form or other.

The situation today is different. Belief in God is now a matter of keen contestation and this contestation is also characterized by a measure of sophistication. "The responsible skeptic, whether agnostic or atheist, is not concerned to deny that religious people have had certain experiences as a result of which they have become convinced of the reality of God. The skeptic believes, however, that these experiences can be adequately accounted for without postulating a God and by adopting instead a naturalistic interpretation of religion. Two of the most influential such interpretations will now be discussed."[1]

The Sociological Theory of Religion

The sociological theory of religion is of special interest in any discussion of the primal philosophy of religion, because it was developed by Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) on the basis of data drawn from the primal religious traditions,[2] and that too from Australia, where the tradition is believed to have enjoyed a continuity denied to it in other parts of the world.[3] The following citation provides a lucid and brief summary of his main thesis.

> Durkheim wished to lay bare the fundamental basis of religion, to find religion in its purest form unobscured by 'popular mythologies and subtle theologies.' He found this elementary form of the religious life in the

> totemism of Australian aborigines, members of a society which, he felt, was surpassed by no other in its simplicity. He assumed that among these clans it was possible to explain their religion, without reference to any other form of religion. Here, Durkheim argued, rituals and ritual attitudes were directed towards the totem, a representative of some species ascribed to all members of a given clan and the source of that clan's identity. This was not a case of animal-worship; animals and plants derived their sacredness from the fact that they were used as totemic objects rather than totems deriving their sacred character from the totemic species. The totem was a representative of something else, a power greater than itself which Durkheim calls the totemic principle or god.

Now comes the crucial move in the argument:

> This principle was, in its turn, society itself. In worshipping the totem and observing taboos concerning the totemic object, the clansmen were re-affirming their collective sense of belonging. Society, Durkheim stressed here as elsewhere, is essentially a moral force; it is external to us and instills in each a sense of obligation. To Durkheim, society, morality and religion were three major elements of a closed and interacting system. The circularity in Durkheim's analysis was not seen as a weakness in his argument; rather, it emphasised that religion was not being 'reduced' to the 'merely social,' for 'the social' was the most fundamental reality of all.[4]

This theory does not make religion a social phenomenon; rather it makes society a religious phenomenon, so that what it being contested is not the truth of religion but the nature of its truth.

Not merely have primal religions served as the basis for this theory, they have also then been used as an arena of its application. Paul Radin has tried to demonstrate, for instance, the social bases of primal monotheism. He links it with the existence of a priestly class, when he writes:

> Actually a really consistent and completely purified conception of a Supreme Deity, i.e., true monotheism, we encounter only in those few tribes where it has, as among the Polynesians and Ewe, become the special belief of a priestly group in a society based on classes, or among the Dakota, where it represents the speculation of a fraternity of priests who have been consciously selected to be the custodians of certain esoteric knowledge and esoteric rites. Monotheism, strictly speaking, is in other words, extremely rare. What we have is monolatry, and this is essentially merely a form of polytheism. Even the monotheism we find is not the expression of a religious faith but of a philosophical drive. It would be just as legitimate to call Socrates or Seneca a monotheist. Monotheism in its strictly religious connotation implies that it is the official faith of the whole community. That is never found among primitive people.[5]

Joseph Goetz has gone a step further and even tried to correlate the type of monotheism with the type of society wherein it is found. He alludes, for instance, to the "vitality of the Sky God in food gathering and pastoral societies" and "his effacement among the planter-agriculturist groups," which "may be of varying degrees."[6]

These linkages are more Weberian than Durkheimian[7] in nature but their broad orientation is similar, that religion is an epiphenomenon of society, a point pushed to what some might consider extremes by Karl Marx.

The sociological theory of religion has been criticised on several grounds. It would be useful to examine these criticisms in the light of the evidence provided by primal religions. This could be followed up by points of criticism arising out of the primal religions themselves, when examined in the light of this theory.

John Hick has summarized the following three main criticisms the sociological theory of religion has attracted as follows:

(1) If it is claimed that religion is an epiphenomenon of society, then it becomes difficult to account for the transocial claims made by religions. We saw, while discussing monotheism, how in Abrahamic monotheism (which may be distinguished here from primal or tribal monotheism) the claim is made that God loves not merely one clan or tribe or society but that "God loves *all* human beings and summons *all* men and women to care for one another as brothers and sisters."[8] In light of is fact then the following objection could be raised:

> How is this striking phenomenon to be thought within the scope of the sociological theory? If the call of God is only society imposing upon its members forms of conduct that are in the interest of that society, what is the origin of the obligation to be concerned equally for *all* humanity? The human race as a whole is not a society as the term is used in the sociological theory. How, then, can the voice of God be equated with that of the group if this voice impels one to extend equally to outsiders the jealously guarded privileges of the group?[9]

(2) This theory "fails to account for the moral creativity of the prophetic mind. The moral prophet is characteristically an innovator, who goes beyond the established ethical code and summons his or her fellows to acknowledge new and far-reaching claims to morality upon their lives."[10] This does not sit well with the view that social morality is merely a byproduct of social reality.

(3) Then there is the question of the individual conscience, which may be at variance with social mores or even the dominant social view. As John Hick points out:

> It is claimed that the sociological theory fails to explain the socially detaching power of conscience. Again the criticism focuses upon the individual who is set at variance with society because he or she "marches to

> a different drum" – for example, an Amos denouncing the Hebrew society of his time or, to span the centuries, a Trevor Huddlestone or Beyers Noude rejecting the hegemony of their own race in South Africa, or Camilo Torres in Colombia, or Vietnam War resisters. If the sociological theory is correct, the sense of divine support should be at a minimum or even altogether absent in such cases. How can the prophet have the support of God against society if God is simply society in disguise? The record shows, however, that the sense of divine backing and support is often at a maximum in such situations. These people are sustained by a vivid sense of the call and leadership of the Eternal.[11]

From the point of view of primal religions these criticisms, *though not without force, are not as forceful as they are when made from within the bosom of Abrahamic monotheism.* They are not without force because primal religions do possess their own brand of universalism but it is less homogenising (some would say hegemonizing) than of the Abrahamic variety. Moreover, primal societies, though not immutable, display a greater measure of ethical stability and calm dignity than other societies more prone to radical change, of which the prophet is often the spokesperson. Similarly, in relation to the third criticism, paradoxically, primal societies provide both more scope for individual dissent and at the same time are more cohesive.

The evidence from primal religions enables one rather to first refine the sociological theory of religion a little further, to present some new evidence it must analytically accommodate and to raise fresh criticisms it must face.

In using primal religions as the basis of his theory, Durkheim may have overlooked a key distinction between types of societies. Thus Georg Simmel has argued that the sociology of religion

> must make a basic distinction between two types of religious organisation. In the first case (he instances many primitive religions), a common god grows out of the 'togetherness' of a unified group. In second case, and here he suggests Christian sects provide good example, it is the concept of the god itself which unites members who may indeed have little else in common.[12]

D.H.J. Morgan alludes to this distinction and supplements it with another distinction, drawn by G. Lenski, between communal and associational aspects of religion, "the former focusing on networks of relationships and patterns of residence among religious adherents, the latter examining their degree of involvement in the church as a specific institution of worship." He concludes that "In making this distinction, Lenski has provided a useful tool for developing our examination of relationship between religion and society."[13] This type of distinction is thus analytically quite consequential. This fact may be particularly significant because Durkheim's approach, when applied to modern society, suffers from a basic shortcoming.

> There is one factor common to all these [modern] cases which is missing from Durkheim's primitive society. That is the fact that they all, to varying degrees, exist in a society where they are faced with hostility, discrimination or a worldly indifference. The unity of these collectivities is maintained, to some degree, *against* the rest of society, the white society, the Gentile society or the worldly secular society. Again we are brought up against the fact that conflict and division are characteristics of society, and that these are as import as unity or cohesion. Durkheim's approach may take us some way in examination of religion in contemporary world, but it does not take us all the way.[14]

We feel that this shortcoming is the direct consequence of Durkheim basing his theory on primal religions of Australia, among whom religious conflict was insignificant.[15]

The Freudian Theory of Religion

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), like Emile Durkheim, provided a new perspective on religion, from which it has often been critiqued. A key element in his theory of religion is the role played by childhood experiences in the development of religious feeling. Freud saw his approach as functioning both at the level of the individual, and of society as a whole.

Freud felt that human beings had an innate need to protect themselves – the instinct for self-preservation. When life was threatened in any way – either as a child by forces one could not control, or as a society by similar forces, then there arose a psychic need to shield oneself against them. At the individual level one could turn to one's father for help; at the social level, when one had to deal with "threatening aspects of nature – earthquake, flood, storm, disease and inevitable death," the process was more complex. The first step was to transform them into mysterious personal powers:

> Impersonal forces and destinies [Freud said] cannot be approached; they remain eternally remote. But if the elements have passions that rage as they do in our own souls, if death itself is not something spontaneous but the violent act of an evil Will, if everywhere in nature there are Beings around us of a kind that were know in our own society, then we can breathe freely, can feel at home in the uncanny and can deal by psychical means with our senseless anxiety. We are still defenseless, perhaps, but we are no longer helplessly paralyzed; we can at least react. Perhaps, indeed, we are not even defenseless. We can apply the same methods against these violent super beings outside that we employ in our own society; we can try to adjure them, to appease them, to bribe them, and, by so influencing them, we may rob them of part of their power.[16]

Elsewhere, Freud tried to explain the feeling of guilt, which is associated with disobeying the behest of society. This view represented the socialization of the Oedipal complex or the sexual attraction males subconsciously felt for their mothers, which makes them resentful of their fathers. Freud brought the two together in his *Totem and Taboo*, in which he argued that the sons ganged up on the father who kept all the females to himself (the primal horde hypothesis) killed him and ate him up. "For having slain their father, the brothers are struck with remorse. They also find that they cannot all succeed to his position and that there is a continuing need for restraint. The dead father's prohibition accordingly takes on a new ('moral') authority as a taboo against incest. This association of religion with the Oedipus complex, which is renewed in each male individual, is held to account for the mysterious authority of God in the human mind and the powerful guilt feelings which make people submit to such a fantasy. Religion is thus a 'return of the repressed.'"[17]

The childhood theme is significant in that Freud used it both to individualize the social and to socialize the individual experience in his discussion of religion. Their interpenetration is captured succinctly by Erich Fromm in the following account:

> *For Freud, religion has its origin in man's helplessness in confronting the forces of nature outside and the instinctive forces within himself.* Religion arises at an early stage of human development when man cannot yet use his reason to deal with there outer and inner forces and must repress them or manage them with the help of other affective forces. So instead of coping with these forces by means of reason he copes with them by "counter-affects," by other emotional forces, the functions of which are to suppress and control that which he is powerless to cope with rationally.

The process, however, does not end there:

> *In this process man develops what Freud calls an "illusion," the material of which is taken from his own individual experience as a child.* Being confronted with dangerous, uncontrollable, and understandable forces within and outside of himself, he remembers, as it were, and regresses to an experience he had as a child, when he felt protected by a father whom he thought to be of superior wisdom and strength, and whose love and protection he could win by obeying his commands and avoiding transgression of his prohibitions.

Finally, the experience of the child is used to explain the phenomenon of religion.

> Thus religion, according to Freud, is a repetition of the experience of the child. Man copes with threatening forces in the same manner in which, as a child he learned to cope with his own insecurity by relying on and admiring

> and fearing his father. Freud compares religion with the obsessional neuroses we find in children. And, according to him, religion is a collective neurosis, caused by conditions similar to those producing childhood neurosis.[18]

Although the individual points of Freud's analysis have been sharply attacked and even been discredited, its general significance continues to be pervasive. Eric J. Sharpe observes, that although the historian of religion "turns to his [specific] theories, if at all, only for light relief" yet "this is not to say that we must simply dismiss Freud as being of no account" for "two major facts remain nevertheless. The first, and the more important is that Freud seriously located the religious impulse below the level of the conscious mind. We may or may not wish to speak of the Oedipus complex in this connection; but we shall probably never again rely to any great extent on the questionnaire method in the study of religion. And secondly, there remains the undeniable impact made by this neurotic, egocentric, intolerant, imaginative scientist on the twentieth-century mind."[19]

And some scholars, while not accepting its explanation of *origin* of religious instinct, have shown interest in it as a possible explanation of its formation. John Hick writes:

> Perhaps the most interesting theological comment to be made upon Freud's theory is that in his work on the father-image he may have uncovered one of the mechanisms by which God creates an idea of deity in the human mind. For if the relation of a human father to his children, is, as the Judaic-Christian tradition teaches, analogous to God's relationship to humanity, it is not surprising that human beings should think of God as their heavenly Father and should come to know God through the infant's experience of utter dependence and the growing child's experience of being lover, cared for, and disciplined within a family. Clearly, to the mind that is not committed in advance to a naturalistic explanation there may be a religious as well as a naturalistic interpretation of the psychological facts.[20]

What light does this theory shed on the primal religious experience?

One point immediately suggests itself – that the primal religions have been associated in Western thought with childhood *both* psychologically and philosophically[21]. This has important implications in the present context. It is well known how primal people were considered "rudimentary rationalists" by the British Anthropological School[22]; Durkheim, after all, dealt with the elementary forms of religious life, while for Freud humanity was only now ready to get over its childhood[23]: "only if we grow up and cease to be children and afraid of authority can we think for ourselves..."[24]

The light it sheds on the study of primal religion is to show how it has, for so long, been an area of darkness, having been at the reductive receiving end of so many physical and social sciences.[25] It could be argued that approaches such as the Freudian, by questioning the enlightenment paradigm,

might create room for a positive reconsideration of primal philosophy (contra Hegel). This, however, never quite occurred that way.[26]

The Challenge of Modern Science

Modern science has been a major player in the modern philosophy of religion and in fact may even be responsible for the rise of that discipline. As John Hick notes:

> The tremendous expansion of scientific knowledge in the modern era has had a profound influence upon religious belief. Further, this influence has been at a maximum within the Judaic-Christian tradition, with which we are largely concerned in this book. There have been a series of specific jurisdictional disputes between the claims of scientific and religious knowledge, and also a more general cumulative effect which constitutes a major factor, critical of religion, in the contemporary intellectual climate.[27]

John Hick distinguishes between three types of challenges posed by modern science to Christianity: (1) to its miracles, (2) to the more specific claims in relation to the particular sciences and (3) by the scientific temper.

In relation to miracles it is possible to adopt two standpoints: (1) to look upon them purely in physical terms "as a breach or suspension of natural law"[28] or (2) "in religious terms as an unusual and striking event that evokes and mediates a vivid awareness or God."[29] Hick points out that on the basis of this distinction one could say that "in the religious sense of the term, …the principle that nothing happens in conflict with natural law does not entail that there are no unusual and striking events evoking and mediating a vivid awareness of God. Natural law consists of generalizations formulated retrospectively to cover whatever has, in fact, happened. When events take place that are not covered by the generalizations accepted thus far, the properly scientific response is not to deny that they occurred but to seek to revise and extend the current understanding of nature in order to include them."[30]

This leaves the claims of the natural sciences intact, while according to "miracles," such as the one involving the withered hand (Luke 6:6-11), *evidentiary* rather than *probative* value in relation to science: as something the believer may believe which remains to be explained by science. Primal religions contain many accounts of "miracles,"[31] specially of healings, and this attitude provides, it seems, a meeting ground for the philosophy of religion and primal religions.

So far as the specific claims in relation to the particular sciences are concerned (such as the geological age of the earth, the geocentric nature of the universe etc.), these claims were made in accordance with the

propositional concept of revelation. However, "advancing knowledge has made it necessary to distinguish between their record of the divine presence and calling, and the primitive world view that formed the framework of their thinking. Having made this distinction, the modern reader can learn to recognize the aspects of the scriptures that reflect the prescientific culture prevailing at the human end of any divine-human encounter."[32]

At yet another level:

> The more general legacy of this long history of interlocking scientific advance and theological retreat is the assumption, now part of the climate of thought in our twentieth-century Western world, that even though the sciences have not specifically disproved the claims of religion, they have thrown such a flood of light upon the world (without at any point encountering that of which religion speaks) that faith can now be regarded as a harmless private fantasy. Religion is seen as a losing cause, destined to be ousted from more and more areas of human knowledge, until at last it arrives at a status akin to that of astrology – a cultural "fifth wheel," persisting only as a survival from previous ages in which our empirical knowledge was much less developed.[33]

Primal cultures, by contrast, though decimated by the advance of Western technology physically, feel less threatened by the advance of Western science, which they see as establishing the viability of the primal world view in many ways. Modern primal thinkers, who see the West as vacillating "between the precepts of Western religion and the concepts of modern science,"[34] feel religiously more anchored than their Christian brothers. Jamake Highwater, after noting that "With the emergence of a relativistic viewpoint in science, with the constant onslaught of observation and hypotheses that countermand the rituals of Judeo-Christian dogma, and with today's deeply felt and daringly facilitated humanism, the first shock waves of a 'cultural earthquake' are awakening Western humankind to the dizzying realization that it is not alone...that there are other worlds,"[35] adds: "a major formulation, for instance, of the New Physics (the Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, as it is known) is the theory called the Many Worlds Interpretation, which envisions an endlessly proliferating number of different branches of reality. According to this theory, whenever a choice is made in the universe between one possible event and another, the universe splits into different branches."[36] He does not feel threatened by it and even seems to welcome it, perhaps because the idea of a pluralistic universe is not entirely alien for the primal tradition.

Vine Deloria, Jr., similarly concludes a chapter in his well known book, *God is Red*, with the following observation:

> The important thing is not an attempt to show that either Indian tribal religions or Christianity prefigured contemporary science, modern concern

for ecological sanity, or a startlingly new idea of what the universe might eventually be. Rather we should find what religious ideas are at least not tied to any particular view of man, nature, or the relationship of man and nature that is clearly in conflict with what we know. In this sense, American Indian tribal religions certainly appear to be more at home in the modern world than Christian ideas and Western man's traditional religious concepts.[37]

CHAPTER V

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The arguments for and against the existence of God were discussed in the previous chapters. While such arguments are nowhere presented in the primal religions the way they are discussed within the philosophy of religion, we discovered that once we adjusted the lens to look for them in the vast realm of primal religious thought, evidence which had a bearing on such discussions was not wanting. The overall philosophical conclusion, that it was difficult to establish the case decisively either way on the question of the existence of God would, however, seem to hold even after the evidence provided by the primal religious tradition had been taken into account. One thus has to agree with the conclusion reached by John Hick at the end of the chapter on "Arguments Against the Existence of God":

> The conclusion of this chapter is thus parallel to the conclusion of the preceding one. There it appeared that we cannot decisively prove the existence of God; here it appears that neither can we decisively disprove God's existence. We have yet to consider what is, for many people, the most powerful reason for doubting the reality of a loving God, namely the immense weight both of human suffering and of human wickedness.[1]

The recognition of suffering and evil, and this struggle to find a proper philosophical place for it in the larger scheme of things, has been a major issue in the Western philosophy of religion. John Hick harks back to it at the beginning of his chapter on the problem of evil and writes:

> For many people it is, more that anything else, the appalling depth and extent of human suffering, together with the selfishness and greed which produce so much of this, that makes the idea of a loving Creator seem implausible and disposes them toward one of the various naturalistic theories of religion.[2]

One does not wish to pile up the agony but one does want to highlight the centrality of the issue in the Western philosophy of religion. The point which

one wishes to make at the outset is that as a philosophical issue this problem of evil, or of theodicy, does not play as major a part in *traditional* philosophy of primal religions but is well on the way towards becoming a major issue in any *modern* philosophy of primal religions, as a result of its devastating encounter with the *modern* world, which has raised for these people the challenge of theism forcefully in its *traditional* form, in which "as a challenge to theism, the problem of evil has been traditionally posed in the form of a dilemma: if God is perfectly loving, God must wish to abolish all evil. But evil exists; therefore God cannot be both omnipotent and perfectly loving."[3]

It was to this dilemma to which Chief Seattle gave a less philosophically honed but a more existentially poignant expression in the following speech.

> SPEECH OF CHIEF SEATTLE
> The son of the white chief says his father
> sends us greetings of friendship and good will.
> This is kind, for we know he has little need of our friendship
> in return, because his people are many.
> They are like the grass that covers the vast prairies,
> while my people are few, and resemble the scattering trees
> of a storm-swept plain.
>
> There was a time
> when our people covered the whole land,
> as the waves of a wind-ruffled sea cover its shell-paved floor
> But that time has long since passed away
> with the greatness of tribes now
> almost forgotten.
>
> Your God loves your people and hates mine; he folds his strong arms lovingly around the white man and leads him as a father leads his infant son, but he has forsaken his red children; he makes your people wax strong every day, and soon they will fill the land; while my people are ebbing away like a fast-receding tide that will never flow again. The white man's God cannot love his red children or he would protect them. They seem to be orphans and can look nowhere for help. How then can we become brothers? How can your father become our father and bring us prosperity and awaken in us dreams of returning greatness?
>
> Your God seems to us to be partial.
> He came to the white man. We never saw Him;
> never even heard his voice; He gave the white man laws
> but he had no word for His red children
> whose teeming million filled this vast continent
> as the stars fill the firmament.
>
> No, we are two distinct races and must ever remain so.

> The white man will never be alone.
> Let him be just and deal kindly with my people,
> for the dead are not altogether powerless.[4]

The discussion of the problem of evil in the philosophy of religion therefore now acquires a new contour, lacking in its more traditional discussions, and must be carried out in three parts. In the first part the conventional approaches to the problem of theodicy in the philosophy of religion will be discussed. In the second part the special case presented not by the philosophy of primal religions but by their *fate* for the philosophy of religion will be discussed. In the final part their case will be compared to similar issues which have arisen in the history of philosophy.

Before carrying out such a threefold examination, however, it might be helpful to indicate a few typical positions on the point found within the primal tradition. A few famous myths from Africa confront human beings with the *insolubility* of the problem, and the need to live on existentially in the face of its rational intractability. In other words, the problem is not solved but an attitude (the right attitude?) to be adopted towards the problem is indicated. Although the resolution is didactic rather than analytic, and the point is made through a story, reminiscent of Job, and is worth sharing. It has to do with an old woman who tries to seek out God to find an answer after a terrible run of bad luck as cited below. The account has been compared to that of Job.[5]

> In every land that she visited people asked why she was travelling and she replied that she had suffered so much at the hands of God that she was seeking him out. But her hearers said this was not strange, for such troubles come to all people and nobody can ever get free of them.[6]

The more general conclusion presented in African lore may also be adumbrated here:

> Although the ways of God are beyond man and can never be fully known, yet numerous titles speak of his sustaining and cherishing work. He gives rain and sun, health and fertility. He is also the deliverer and Saviour, moulder and providence. Disease and poverty, drought and famine, locusts and death come to plague man, but they are part of the mystery of nature. Although life is viewed, inevitably, from the human standpoint, yet man in not the centre of the universe in African thought, any more than in Christian theology. It is God who is supreme and the central moving force, and man submits to him as the great chief.[7]

There are several important philosophical clues here; one, much developed in Islam emphasizes the omnipotence of God. In fact Al-Ghazali employs the Pauline metaphor of the pot-maker and his pots to place God's action beyond questioning. We may wish to focus on another: that the self-

absorption which comes from considering our sufferings may prevent the emergence of an appreciation of the larger transpersonal, if not nonpersonal, contexts in which they occur.

II

John Hick has noted succinctly in relation to the traditional approaches to the problem of evil:

> There are three main Christian responses to the problem of evil: the Augustinian response, hinging upon the concept of the fall of man from an original state of righteousness; the Irenaean response, hinging upon the idea of the gradual creation of a perfected humanity through life in a highly imperfect world; and the response of modern process theology, hinging upon the idea of a God who is not all-powerful and not in fact able to prevent the evils arising either in human beings or in the processes of nature.[8]

Before one can turn to an examination of these three responses, however, an issue common to all of them needs to be addressed. The issue is: who is to be held responsible for evil, man or God? The thrust of the argument is that if God is all-powerful then He or She could have willed and acted in such a way as eliminated evil altogether. So why is it allowed, under any of the three doctrines pertaining to it to be discussed?

> The common ground is some form of what has come to be called the free-will defense, at least so far as the moral evil of human wickedness is concerned, for Christian thought has always seen moral evil as related to human freedom and responsibility. To be a person is to be a finite center of freedom, a (relatively) self-directing agent responsible for one's own decisions. This involves being free to act wrongly as well as rightly. There can therefore be no certainty in advance that a genuinely free moral agent will never choose amiss. Consequently, according to the strong form of free-will defense, the possibility of wrongdoing is logically inseparable from the creation of finite persons, and to say that God should not have created beings who might sin amounts to saying that God should not have created people.[9]

How much free will, then, do primal religions allow to its followers? Just as some might argue that the overpowering will of God can leave no room for the exercise of human will, it has been argued that primal religion similarly does not allow for free will, though for a different reason.[10] The prevailing notion, however, seems more along the lines which does allow moral free will. "One of the Ashanti priests is reported as saying that God 'created the possibility of evil in the world...God has created the knowledge

of Good and Evil in every person and allowed him to choose his way,' without forbidding him or forcing His will on him."[11]

The Augustinian Theodicy

Augustine (354-430 A.D.) produced a theodicy which reconciled God's goodness, especially as expressed in creation, with the presence of evil in it. Very briefly, Augustine argued that

> Evil – whether it be an evil will, an instance of pain, or some disorder or decay in nature – has therefore not been set there by God but represents the going wrong of something that is inherently good. Augustine points to blindness as an example. Blindness is not a 'thing.' The only thing involved is the eye, which is in itself good; the evil of blindness consists of the lack of a proper functioning of the eye. Generalizing the principle, Augustine holds that evil always consists of the malfunctioning of something that is in itself good.[12]

So evil can thus be reconciled with God's goodness. But how did it come about? It came about through the free (but wicked) exercise of will by angels and human beings. Hence Augustine could say that "all evil is either sin or punishment of sin." On the Day of Judgement the matter will be taken into account. Augustine "is invoking here a principle of moral balance according to which sin that is justly punished is thereby cancelled out and no longer regarded as marring the perfection of God's universe."[13]

Some elements of Augustine's theodicy find an echo in some primal religions but not others. African society does not distinguish between 'natural' and 'moral' evil,[14] regarding the former a punishment for the latter but at the same time "the majority of the African peoples feel that God punishes in this life. ...With a few exceptions, there is no belief that a person is punished in the hereafter for what he does wrong in this life."[15]

So far as the criticism of Augustinian theodicy is concerned, the material from the primal traditions of Africa is also relevant. One criticism of Augustinian theodicy has been the concept of eternal damnation, an aspect of his doctrine which at least modern minds find unpalatable. That this is not an issue with the African material should be apparent from the earlier remarks. A second criticism of Augustine has been the conflation of moral and natural evil. "All evidence suggests that humanity gradually emerged out of lower forms of life with a very limited moral awareness and with very crude religious conceptions. Again, it is no longer possible to regard the natural evils of disease, earthquakes, and the like as consequences of the fall of humanity, for we now know that they existed long before human beings came upon the scene. Life preyed upon life, and there were storms and earthquakes as well as disease (signs of arthritis have been found in the

bones of some prehistoric animals) during the hundreds of millions of years before *homo sapiens* emerged."[16] The same difficulty characterises African thought. In fact John S. Mbiti despairs of finding any logic in the matter and remarks, "The logic here is that 'natural evil' is present because these immoral agents exist; and these are evil because they do evil deeds. Again I confess that I do not understand this logic, but I accept it as valid for our understanding of African religions and philosophy."[17]

Here a digression into Eastern thought may be of some use. It is often said in Hinduism that one *is* not evil so much as one *commits* an evil act. In this sense we are good if we do good deeds and evil if we do evil deeds. This doctrine of karma is one way in which the goodness of God is reconciled with the presence of evil in the world without compromising God's goodness, because this evil is the result of the action performed by the embodied soul. It seems as if a similar buffer has been set up between God and evil here. From the point of view of Augustinian theodicy, however, another aspect of the African situation is even more relevant. This has to do with the fact that "even if, as we have pointed out, God is thought to be the ultimate upholder of the moral order, people do not consider him to be immediately involved in the keeping of it. Instead, it is the patriarchs, matriarchs, living-dead, elders, priests and even divinities and spirits who are the daily guardians or police of human morality."[18] Such insulation of God is not altogether missing in Augustinian theodicy, but the buffer zone seems to be smaller.

The Irenaean Theodicy

The theodicy as suggested by Irenaeus (c. 130 - c. 202 A.D.) has much to recommend itself in the opinion of John Hick. This theodicy rests biblically on the different use of the words which describe God's resemblance to man: as reflected in the use of the word 'image' and 'likeness' in Genesis 1:26. This leads Irenaeus to suggest that humanity is marching from mere likeness to true image and in this uphill task what we call evil is the wages of ascent. This theodicy also makes the issue of the distinction between moral and natural evil less pressing:

> Even though the bulk of actual human pain is traceable, as a sole or part cause, to misused human freedom, there remain other sources of pain that are entirely independent of the human will – for example, bacteria, earthquake, hurricane, storm, flood, drought, and blight. In practice it is often impossible to trace a boundary between the suffering that results from human wickedness and folly and that which befalls humanity from without; both are inextricably mingled in our experience. For our present purpose, however, it is important to note that the latter category does exist and that it seems to be

> built into the very structure of our world. In response to it, theodicy, if it is wisely conducted, follows a negative path. It is not possible to show positively that each item of human pain serves God's purpose of good; on the other hand, it does seem possible to show that the divine purpose, as it is understood in the Irenaean theology, could not be forwarded in a world that was designed as a permanent hedonistic paradise.[19]

From the point of view of primal thought such a theodicy would seem unsatisfactory on the ground that God, in primal religions, is visualized as either closer to or farther that human beings than allowed by this theodicy. If we choose the following example then God is closer than imagined in this theodicy.

> The greater part of primitive man's actions were, so he thought, simply a repetition of a primeval action accomplished at the beginning of time by a divine being, or mythical figure. An act only had meaning in so far as it repeated a transcendent model, an archetype. The object of that repetition was also to ensure the *normality* of the act, to legalize it by giving it an ontological status; it only became real in so far as it repeated an archetype. Now, every action performed by the primitive supposes a transcendent model – his actions are effective only in so far as they are real, as they follow the pattern. The action is both a ceremony (in that it makes man part of a sacred zone) and a thrusting into reality. All these observations imply shades of meaning which will become clearer when we are in a position to discuss the examples given in the following chapters. However, I felt it necessary to suggest these implications from the first so as to demonstrate the aspect of theory in 'primitive' religion which is so often missed."[20]

On the other hand, the two are much further apart according to this view:

> Nzame [God] is on high, man below,
>
> God is God, man is man
>
> Each is at home, each in his own house.[21]

Process Theodicy

This approach to theodicy is associated with the name of A.N. Whitehead (1861-1947), and that of David Griffin. Its theological framework may be stated in the following terms:

> According to the main Christian tradition, God is the creator and sustainer of the entire universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), and God's ultimate power over the creation is accordingly unlimited. However, in order to allow for the existence and growth of free human beings, God withholds the exercise of unlimited divine power, thereby forming an autonomous creaturely realm within which God acts non-coercively, seeking the creatures' free responses.

> Process theology likewise holds that God acts noncoercively, by "persuasion" and "lure," but in contrast to the notion of divine self-limitation, holds that God's exercise of persuasive rather than controlling power is necessitated by the ultimate metaphysical structure of reality. God is subject to the limitations imposed by the basic laws of the universe, for God has not created the universe *ex nihilo*, thereby establishing its structure, but rather the universe is an uncreated process which includes the deity.

Some distinctions also need to be recognized within this framework.

> In some passages, indeed, Whitehead seems to say that the ultimate metaphysical principles were initially established by a primordial divine decision. However, Griffin follows Charles Hartshorne, another leading process thinker, in holding that those ultimate principles are eternal necessities, not matters of divine fiat. They are laws of absolute generality such that no alternative to them is conceivable; as such they fall outside the scope even of the divine will. Accordingly, as Griffin says, "God does not refrain from controlling the creatures simply because it is better for God to use persuasion, but because it is necessarily the case that God cannot completely control the creatures."[22]

If this provides a point of contrast with Augustinian theodicy, then the following consideration sets it apart from the Irenaean, that "in its Irenaean form, the creatures whom God is seeking to make perfect through their own freedom, were initially created by God and thus are formed with a Godward bias to their nature. For process thought, on the other hand, their very creation came about in struggle with the primordial chaos, so that the divine purpose is only imperfectly written into their nature."[23]

Each moment [24] in this system possesses dual efficacy; that of "prehensions" or selections of the past constituting a "concrescence" and that of influencing the future. But because moment is a creative moment, in and of itself and not outside of it, there is no predictability of its conformity to God's will so that "God's will is in fact thwarted"[25] and in the words of Whitehead: "So far as the conformation is incomplete, there is evil in the world."[26]

What is the nature of this evil? According to process theology the moment of experience should maximize two values: harmony and intensity. Thus the concrescence of multiplicity may be less harmoniously complex than it could be. The same is true of intensity. Both situations represent evil as discord and triviality respectively. This, however, is inevitable as sill become clear soon. Hence God has to make an overall judgement about the cosmic process: whether the good in it exceeds evil. And that apparently is this judgement.

However, why is evil inevitable? It is inevitable in this theodicy for several systemic reasons, a few of which we have already noted, namely (1)

God is limited by laws, (2) human beings are delicately poised between good and evil; (3) each moment is a loose cannon; (4) the emerging plan may not be a merging plan so far as God's scheme is concerned; (5) "To some extent harmony and intensity are in conflict with one another, for a higher level of intensity is made possible by increased complexity, thus endangering harmony"[27]; (6) greater complexity may also make greater dimensions of suffering possible; and so on.

However, while evil thus becomes an "inherent part of the creative process,"[28] in this theodicy it does offer some advantages: it avoids the problem of divine omnipotence as well as human moral impotence, for now a human being can range himself or herself on the side of God.[29]

By now the reader must be beginning to wonder: what has all this to do with the primal perspective on the philosophy of religion? Quite a bit, although it is not apparent at first sight. First of all, there are a number of standpoints found in the primal religions which find a place here as well. For instance, the most systemic formulator of the process theodicy, David Griffin, while not dismissing the possibility of continued human existence after death, is emphatic that we not draw from this possibility the hope of a limitless post-mortem bliss. "He is insistent that any justification must be found in the actual character of human existence in the world."[30] Given the paucity of belief in post-mortem existence, specially in the African primal tradition,[31] such a position accords well with it. Moreover, although some primal traditions may believe not only in creation *ex nihilo* but in creation *ex nihilissimo*[32], many do not: "Sometimes nothing, and at other times from an already existent primal matter"[33] The latter option conforms to the process theodicy. Moreover, God is not omnipotent in the sense that his commands are sometimes disregarded. "The Mende of Sierra Leone say that the dog and the toad were sent to take messages from God to men. The dog was to say that men would not die, and the toad was to say that they would. They left together but the dog stopped to eat, and the toad went on without delay and called out in the town of men that death had come. Although the dog then came crying that life had come, it was too late. A Zulu story blames the chameleon for coming too slowly with the message that man would not die, for it stopped to eat fruit on the way. God sent the lizard later with the message of death, but it arrived first and men accepted its word before the chameleon came along."[34]

Far more significant than these resemblances is the relation of process theology, as a whole, to the primal religious experience. Vine Deloria, Jr., is inclined to take a positive view of process theology as a theological development, because it enlarges the availability of religious ideas which human beings can draw upon as they face the future.[35] Moreover, when he asks the specific question: "which religious atmosphere, Christian or Indian,

would appear to be more compatible with contemporary scientific ideas?" he tends to answer it in favour of the India but not without making appreciative nods towards process theology, as it clear from the following two references: (1) "Our further question, therefore, should concern how religious statements are to be made which are either broad enough or specific enough to parallel what we are discovering in nature through scientific experiments. Christian theology has traditionally fluctuated between the philosophical views of Plato and Aristotle. Occasionally some theologian will go to the ideas of Kant or Descartes to find a usable system to explain religious ideas in a scientific manner. Some theologians have gone so far as Alfred North Whitehead's view of the universe to find a way to describe religious ideas by the same basic form of articulation as followed in scientific circles."[36] (2) "In conclusion, we have the rather startling statement of Alfred North Whitehead about the nature of God: 'Not only does God [primordial nature] arrange the eternal objects; be also makes them available for use by the other actual entities. This is God's function as the principle of concretion.' Again we are dealing with a complexity of relationships in which no particular object is given primacy over any other object or entity. While Whitehead cannot be said to be the last word on either theology or science, he is not an inconsiderable figure in Western thought, and even he goes beyond traditional Western religious thinking in an effort to find more compatible ideas for consideration."[37]

This is fine so long as one does not look at the dark side of it, to which John Hick draws pointed attention. He writes:

> One basic claim – with which process theologians would not, needless to say, agree – is that it involves a morally and religiously unacceptable elitism. In all ages the majority of people have lived in hunger or the threat and fear of hunger – often severely undernourished, subject to crippling injuries and debilitating diseases, so that only the fittest could survive infancy – they have dwelt under conditions of oppression or slavery and in a constant state of insecurity and anxiety.[38]

He goes on to say:

> It would of course be quite wrong to say that, within the process theodicy, the unfortunate have suffered deprivation *in order that* the fortunate may enjoy their blessings. It is not that some have been deliberately sacrificed for the good of others. The more extreme evils of human cruelty and neglect, injustice and exploitation might conceivable never have occurred – and the creative process would have been the better without them. The process doctrine (as presented by Griffin) is rather that the possibility of creating the degree of human good that has in fact come about involved the possibility of creating theodicy, the good that has occurred renders worthwhile all the wickedness that has been committed and all the suffering that has been endured.[39]

John Hick is very careful in his criticism. Noting that this charge that "The God of the process theodicy is – according to this line of criticism – the God of the elite,"[40] is a charge, he is prepared to argue that it holds, despite the fact that some of the process theologians "have aligned themselves with the contemporary liberation theology movement."[41] For John Hick "The question remains whether the move is compatible with the process theodicy presented by Griffin."[42] In fact, John Hick links process theodicy not only with elitism but also with *laissez-faire* capitalist theory.[43]

We are now ready for the crucial question. It may be raised after the following passage on process theodicy has left the desired impression on our minds:

> [The] question as to whether God is indictable is to be answered in terms of the question as to whether the positive values that are possible in our world are valuable enough to be worth the risk of the negative experiences which have occurred, and the even greater horrors which stand before us as real possibilities for the future. Should God, for the sake of avoiding the possibility of persons such as Hitler, and horrors such as Auschwitz, have precluded the possibility of Jesus, Gautama, Socrates, Confucius, Moses, Mendelssohn, El Greco, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Florence Nightingale, Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Chief Joseph, Chief Seattle, Alfred North Whitehead, John F. Kennedy, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sojourner Truth, Helen Keller, Louis Armstrong, Albert Einstein, Dag Hammarskjold, Reinhold Niebuhr, Carol Channing, Margaret Mead, and millions of other marvelous human beings, well known and not well known alike, who have lived on the face of this earth? In other words, should God, for the sake of avoiding "man's inhumanity to man," have avoided humanity (or some comparably complex species) altogether? Only those who could sincerely answer this question affirmatively could indict the God of process theology on the basis of the evil in the world.[44]

Should one add to the horrors of Auschwitz the virtually genocidal decimation of the American Indians in North America and read the passage again with Vine Deloria, Jr.? For if one did so, one would feel compelled to ask the following question to which either there is no answer or it is too obvious to be stated.

> The trail of man is dotted with the graves of countless communities which reached an untimely end. But is there any justification for this violation of human life? Have we any idea of what the world loses when one racial culture is extinguished? It is true that the Red Indians have not made, to all appearance, any contribution to the world's progress, but have we any clear understanding of their undeveloped possibilities which, in God's good time, might have come to fruition? Do we know so much of ourselves and the world and God's purpose as to believe that our civilization, our institutions

and our customs are so immeasurably superior to those of others, not only what others actually possess but what existed in them potentially? We cannot measure beforehand the possibilities of a race. Civilizations are not made in a day, and had the fates been kindlier and we less arrogant in our ignorance, the world, I dare say, would have been richer for the contributions of the Red Indians.[45]

CHAPTER VI

THE CONCEPT OF REVELATION AND THE PRIMAL RELIGIOUS TRADITION

I

Scholars have often been accused of perpetuating the very world they analyze. If one succeeds in achieving, even partially, what one has attempted in this chapter, it should render the scholarly community less liable to that accusation. Its goal, however, is modest and certainly much more modest than that of Marx, who would that one studied philosophy not merely to understand but to change the world. This chapter studies the world, especially the primal world, for how it might change our understanding of philosophy, or more precisely, the philosophy of religion. The purpose of this chapter then is to examine how the concept of revelation in the philosophy of religion fares, when that concept is exposed to materials drawn from primal religions.[1] This task has not hitherto been attempted from within the philosophy of religion[2] to the best of our knowledge.

II

The first issue which arises on undertaking such an enterprise is that of the adequacy, in the present context, of the Christian approach to revelation, which is more or less taken for granted as normative in the discussion of the topic in the philosophy of religion.

This current approach in the philosophy of religion towards revelation distinguishes between two theories of revelation; namely, the propositional and the non-propositional. John Hick has pointed out that "Christian thought contains two very different understandings of the nature of revelation and, as

a result, two different conceptions of faith (as the human reception of revelation), of the Bible (as a medium of revelation), and of theology (as discourse based upon revelation)"[3] These two positions are then summarized by him as follows: "The view that dominates the medieval period and that is represented today by more traditional forms of Roman Catholicism (and also, in a curious meeting of opposites, by conservative Protestantism) can be called the 'propositional' understanding of revelation. According to this view, the content of revelation is a body of truths expressed in statements or propositions. Revelation is the imparting to people of divinely authenticated truths. In the words of the older *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 'Revelation may be defined as the communication of some truth by God to a rational creature through means which are beyond the ordinary course of nature.'"[4] This propositional view of revelation has been contested by another, the non-propositional view of revelation. "According to this nonpropositional view, the content of revelation is not a body of truths about God, but God coming within the orbit of human experience by acting in history. From this point of view, theological propositions, as such, are not revealed but represent human attempts to understand the significance of revelatory events. This nonpropositional conception of revelation is connected with the modern renewed emphasis upon the *personal* character of God and the thought that the divine-human personal relationship consists of something more than the promulgation and reception of theological truths." [5]

The Christian concept thus relies on the idea of God's disclosure to human beings either *verbally* or *historically*. Both these disclosures, however, come about *through a scripture*. Such a view immediately poses a twofold problem from the perspective of primal religions on *its own ground*. A revelation is, by definition, a revelation of truth. However, religiously sensitive thinkers of the primal religious traditions remain unconvinced of the veracity of the Christian revelation on its own ground. In relation to the propositional view of revelation they point out that it exists in the form of scripture, as something written down. But Jesus Christ, around which the scriptural world revolves, himself "left no writings."[6] In other words, the verbal revelation already stands one step removed from its primal source, as we have it now. Not only did Jesus never write a word, what was supposed to happen historically about him has failed to transpire, namely, the Second Coming. It has yet to materialize.[7] This is why the primal religious thinkers tend to take a sceptical view of revelation, as traditionally conceived, within the philosophy of religion. Indeed, from the point of view of the study of primal religions, it may now be claimed that it is primal religions which shed new light on the content of Christian revelation. The phenomenon of the cargo cult acquires special significance in this context. Although the phenomenon of cargo cults is associated with Melanesia, parallel phenomena

are clearly discernible in many cases,[8] as for instance in the Ghost Dance Cult of the Native Americans in the late nineteenth century.[9] In order to see the implication of this phenomenon, more generally referred to as revitalization movements, one must bear in mind that "In every case the cargo cult is a broad reflection of the colonial political and cultural subjugation which an innovative religious cosmology legitimates"[10] and that there are two elements common to its numerous manifestations: "the 'cargo' in the foreigner's ships, and the natives own ancestors."[11] Many cargo cults foresee the apocalyptic destruction of the whites and the restoration of a new order characterized by plenty.

One's perception of the early Christian experience is, speaking as a historian of religion, profoundly altered, if this model is applied to that experience. The colonial, political and cultural subjugation of the Hebrews by the Romans, the consequent wish for the "cargo" of political supremacy and the intervention of the spirits such as the Holy Spirit in the matter, the expectation of the Second Coming and the destruction of non-Christians followed by a reign of plenty, though not on all fours with the cargo cult model, bear such striking resemblance to it that it is hard to put it out of mind and not to call for investigation by scholars more competent in this field. The study of new religious movements may here open up a strikingly new perspective for examining the early history of Christianity.[12]

Moreover, some of the new religious movements have been rash enough to make specific prophecies and scholars, like Leon Festinger and others, have examined the issue of what happens *When Prophecy Fails*.[13] In this classic study of a UFO cult the reaction of its followers to the failure of the predictions to materialize was analyzed, after this failure gave rise to what Festinger calls "cognitive dissonance" – the simultaneous presence of two inconsistent cognitions which is potentially stressful. In this case the options for handling the situation were clear: either one overlooked the prediction, or abandoned the cult, or notwithstanding an awareness of the failure retained membership of the cult. This last course of action seems highly illogical and yet not only was this course adopted by many, it was discovered that those who had a considerable "amount of social support at the time of the disconfirmation... retained their faith (though not without some effort)," but those who were "alone when they confronted the fact that the prophecy had failed invariably abandoned it."[14]

These findings could throw new light on how the Christian Church faced the disconfirmation of the Second Coming.[15] For when the Second Coming ceased to materialize for centuries the *logical* expectation should have been the abandonment of Christianity by people in large numbers; instead, the Church emerged strengthened by the crisis. This is perhaps a development which can be anticipated by the model under study, for under certain

conditions Festinger *et al.* postulate "an increase in religious fervour and belief after an irrefutable disconfirmation of prophecy"[16], which seems to apply to this case. The basic factor to be considered is the strength of the socially intermeshed network of believers. Thus the Christian experience here may again benefit from a conclusion drawn from the study of some new religious movements in a primal context, namely, "that religious belief does not depend solely on the logical consequences of prophecy and real world experience... It is not unfulfilled prophecy *per se* that irrevocably disillusions believers, but rather it is the social conditions in which such disconfirmations are received that determine their ultimate impact on faith."[17] This gives a new meaning to the role of the *social gospel aspect* of Christianity. Elaine Pagels has also drawn fresh attention to the role of social factors in the formative phase of Christianity itself in her recent work: *The Origin of Satan*.[18]

III

At a secondary level, the way in which the primal religious tradition actually encountered the Christian revelation was not designed to enhance their confidence in its truth-claims. The other modalities of revelation – the *verbal* and the *historical* – did not operate for the primal peoples in a way as might inspire divine confidence in them, when the primal peoples encountered them. They encountered them in their imperial and secular rather than pious Christian versions: the verbal modality as literacy and the historical modality as missionary activity or outright conquest. It is possible to regard these as secular surrogates of the Christian concepts as suggested above, but it was through them that the primal people experienced the Christian presence. It has thus been alleged that literacy was used or perhaps abused by the Christian community to defraud and exploit nonliterate primal cultures[19] and the concept of history was employed in the form of doctrines such as those of "progress" or "manifest destiny," to obscure the legitimate and even legal claims of the primal people.[20] In other words, the *historical* experience of the primal people with Christianity seems to have cast a cloud of philosophical doubt over its revelatory modalities.

IV

At even a tertiary level, the propositional and non-propositional doctrines of revelation in the philosophy of religion pose difficulties from a primal point of view. The Christian concept of revelation, in either case, intimately relies on God's revelation to human beings either through word (verbally) or deed (historically). Yet these are not the ways in which God has been typically

experienced in primal religions. Even when these modalities have appeared, they have assumed different forms. Thus the *verbal* mode has taken the form of oral narratives[21] and oracles[22] and *historical* mode has always possessed a remarkably mythic dimension.[23] In fact, a much more fundamental issue seems to be at stake from the point of view of the philosophy of religion. It is a truism that words are also symbolic in nature, no less than icons or images. However, the philosophy of religion has accorded special status to *language* as a symbol-system and has not extended the same recognition to *objects* of art or culture as distinguished from words. In this sense, for want of a better word, the philosophy of religion may be described as logocentric.

A philosophy perhaps must be so by its very nature. The problem this poses in the context of primal religions is that while most of the religions usually discussed within the philosophy of religion express themselves simultaneously in *words* and *objects* – in philosophy and in art – the philosophy of religion, while focusing on the former mode of expression, is nevertheless able to do justice to the thought of the tradition as a whole. The primal religions present a challenge to the philosophy of religion by confronting it primarily with objects instead of words. As these objects often tend to appear grotesque, the philosopher of religion is inclined to ignore them instead of attempting to tease out the worldview embodied in them and to express it in words as a valid philosophy of religion.

This, no doubt, represents a reversal of our normal experience in which explanation by words precedes or is simultaneous with the perception of the object. It is because we are aware of the passion narratives that the image of Christ on the Cross does not appear to us as an undeciphered object of primitive art. We see the issue involved in a flash once the image is deprived of the narrative – it is reduced to a primitive meaningless object. The problem which primal religions present is this – that their philosophical or narrative thinking itself has often been carried out *not* through texts but objects. Hence a primal perspective on the philosophy of religion involves the acceptance, retrieval and incorporation of such philosophy, originally expressed in objects rather that words, into the philosophy of religion. This process has commenced. "There has been an enlargement beyond doctrinal emphases that center religion on a set of beliefs that can be written as a creedal statement; an enlargement beyond religion conceived exclusively as an institutional entity with a directive priesthood or authoritative voice. These aspects are not to be denied, but that overly narrow construal of religion has been broadened to include other dimensions, such as aesthetic expressions..."[24]

A good illustration of this is provided by the "monstrous feline crouches" in Columbia, the jaguar-monsters of San Agustin. These could easily be dismissed as meaningless primitive representations unless the following

clarifying question was asked: "What, then, do these different types of feline sculptures represent, and how do they *express iconographically* one of *the major tenets of a religious system*?"[25]

A primal perspective on the philosophy of religion predisposes one to ask such a question. And it is only *after* such a question had been posed that objects of primal religion were found to acquire, upon further investigation: "A much wider meaning, in accordance with a broad underlying system of beliefs related to the shamanistic power quest and the all-important concept of procreative energy."[26] Without the philosophical context they appear: "Figures of fantasy and nightmare" but once their language of objects rather than words is understood a conclusion of such philosophical nuance as the following can be reached: "It is obvious then that the jaguar-monster is not a deity, a divine being whom people would adore as a god, but rather a general principle of creation and destruction – a natural life force, so to speak – himself subject to a higher power. This point is clearly stated in many aboriginal myths: The jaguar was not alone in the beginning but was created by a divine being and set into this world as a great ambivalent force capable of good or evil. It has to be mastered not only by the shaman but also by each person for himself, if a moral and social order is to be preserved. The Jaguar is man, is the male; it stands for all human nature that is sexually and socially aggressive and predatory, and whose energy has to be curbed by cultural restrictions to ensure the survival of society."[27]

V

But what about a phenomenological rather that a merely philosophical approach to the concept of revelation? Might not its more inclusive nature allow for the material from primal religions to be accommodated within it? Johannes Deninger, for instance, offers the following five phenomenological criteria of revelation:

> (1) Origin or author: God, spirits, ancestors, power (*mana*), forces. In every case the source of revelation is something supernatural or numinous.
>
> (2) Instrument or means: sacred signs in nature (the stars, animals, sacred places, or sacred times); dreams, visions, ecstasies; finally, words or sacred books.
>
> (3) Content or object: the didactic, helping, or punishing presence, will, being, activity, or commission of the divinity.
>
> (4) Recipients or addressees: medicine men, sorcerers, sacrificing priests, shamans, soothsayers, mediators, prophets with a commission or information intended for individuals or groups, for a people or the entire race.

(5) Effect and consequence for the recipient: personal instruction or persuasion, divine mission, service as oracle – all this through inspiration or, in the supreme case, through incarnation.[28]

The phenomenologists have cast their net wider than the philosopher but they too may have failed to reel in the catch. The catch lies in the expression “in nature” when the instrument or means of revelation is discussed. For, from the perspective of primal religions, *nature itself* can be the medium of revelation, rather than something contained *in* it, such as a sacred place or animal. Yahweh offered to the Hebrews Israel, which was a piece of nature (land) but it was the “effect or consequence for the recipient” (Deninger’s item 5) not the “instrument or means” (Deninger’s item 2).

Shinto provides a closer parallel with stories of its specific creation by the *kamis*, as in the picturesque account of an island being formed through a bejeweled spear, as in Chapter 3 of the *Kojiki*:

(1) At this time the heavenly deities, all with one command, said to the two deities IZANAGI-NO-MIKOTO and IZANAMI-NO-MIKOTO:

“Complete and solidify this drifting land!”

(2) Giving them the Heavenly Jeweled Spear, they entrusted the mission to them.

(3) Thereupon, the two deities stood on the Heavenly Floating Bridge and, lowering the jeweled spear, stirred with it. They stirred the brine with a churning-churning sound; and when they lifted up [the spear] again, the brine dripping down from the tip of the spear piled up and became an island. This was the island ONOGORO.[29]

The process, as described in Chapter 6, refers to the islands being begotten:

CHAPTER 6

IZANAGI AND IZANAMI GIVE BIRTH TO NUMEROUS ISLANDS.

(1) After they had finished saying this, they were united and bore as a child [the island] APADI-NO-PO-NO-SA-WAKE-NO-SIMA.

(2) Next they bore the double island of IYO. This island has one body and four countenances, each with a separate name:

(3) Thus, the land of IYO is named EPIME; the land of SANUKI is named IPI-YORI-PIKO; the land of APA is named OPO-GE-TU-PIME; and the land of TOSA is named TAKE-YORI-WAKE.

(4) Next they bore the triple island of OKI, also named AME-NO-0SI-KORO-WAKE.

(5) Next they bore the island of TUKUSI. This island also has one body and four countenances, each with a separate name:[30]

After the two together had brought forth a number of deities, Izanami dies. As Izanami dies, she gives birth to numerous deities from her body, reminiscent of the *Puruṣasūkta* of the Ṛg Veda (X-90),[31] although in this case they are born not so much from the body as from her bodily secretions like vomit, urine, etc.[32] Similarly, various items *grow* from the corpse of the deity OPO-GE-TU-PIME-NO KAMI, rather than emerging from dismembered parts of the body.[33] Nevertheless the parallel with the sacrifice of the *puruṣa* does have a teasing quality to it.

In Chapter XI Izanagi does the same. He generates a host of *kamis* as he ritually cleanses himself, providing an interesting case of creation not through ritual as such but ritual cleansing:

IZANAGI PURIFIES HIMSELF, GIVING BIRTH TO

MANY DEITIES INCLUDING AMA-TERASU-

OPO-MI-KAMI AND SUSA-NO-WO.

(1) Hereupon, IZANAGI-NO-OPO-KAMI said:

"I have been to a most unpleasant land, a horrible, unclean land. Therefore I shall purify myself."

(2) Arriving at [the plain] AKAPAKE-PARA by the river-mouth of TATIBANA in PIMUKA in TUKUSI, he purified and exorcised himself.

(3) When he flung down his stick, there came into existence a deity named TUKI-TATU-PUNA-TO-NO-KAMI.

(4) When he flung down his sash, there came into existence a deity named MITI-NO-NAGA-TI-PA-NO-KAMI.

(5) Next, when he flung down his bag, there came into existence a deity named TOKI-PAKASI-NO-KAMI.[34]

The parallel with the Australian aboriginal experience is striking, where the activity of the mythic beings in mythic time (often called Dreaming) involved the "process of shaping that world, making it habitable or humanized – that is, preparing it for the emergence of a human population."[35] The identification of some beings with the contour of the land was so close that sometimes "a natural feature [was] itself iconographic"[36] However, two differences between the Japanese original and Australian aboriginal experiences also stand out. There is a clearer sense of linear time in the Japanese accounts and the Japanese quickly acquired scriptures, in the form of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*, as soon as writing was introduced. It is an interesting point for our consideration that although these texts are canonical in one sense, in another they are not. They are not like Western scriptures in terms of function although they approximate them in terms of form; yet again they seem to differ in terms of content. In other words, even when religions with marked primal features become historical religions, this fact leaves its tell-tale signatures on their sacred texts.

Although a special connection to nature distinguishes primal religion, the nature of the connection can vary. Now what do we mean by nature? In primal religions it primarily means the earth. But the attitudes of the American Indians possess a different configuration than that of the Australian aborigines, as becomes apparent from the following account:

> When I was a young man I went to a medicine-man for advice concerning my future. The medicine-man said: "I have not much to tell you except to help you understand this earth on which you live. If a man is to succeed on the hunt or the warpath, he must not be governed by his inclination, but by an understanding of the ways of animals and of his natural surroundings, gained through close observation. The earth is large, and on it live many animals. The earth is under protection of something which at times becomes visible to the eye. One would think this would be at the center of the earth, but its representations appear everywhere, in large and small forms – they are the sacred stones. The presence of a sacred stone will protect you from misfortune." He then gave me a sacred stone which he himself had worn. I kept it with me wherever I went and was helped by it. He also told me where I might find one for myself. *Wakan Tanka* tells the sacred stones many things which may happen to people. The medicine-man told me to observe my natural surroundings, and after my talk with him I observed them closely. I watched the changes of the weather, the habits of animals, and all the things by which I might be guided in the future, and I stored this knowledge in my mind.[37]

The following account is even more illuminating. "Oren Lyons was the first Onondagan to enter college. When he returned to his reservation for his first vacation, his uncle proposed a fishing trip on a lake. Once he had his nephew in the middle of the lake where he wanted him, he began to interrogate him. 'Well, Oren,' he said, 'you've been to college; you must be pretty smart now from all they've been teaching you. Let me ask you a question. Who are you?' Taken aback by the question, Oren fumbled for an answer. 'What do you mean, who am I? Why, I'm your nephew, of course.' His uncle rejected his answer and repeated his question. Successively, the nephew ventured that he was Oren Lyons, an Onondagan, a human being, a man, a young man, all to no avail. When his uncle had reduced him to silence and he asked to be informed as to who he was, his uncle said, 'Do you see that bluff over there? Oren, you *are* that bluff. And that giant pine on the other shore? Oren, you are that pine. And this water that supports our boat? You are this water.'"[38]

Just as the Australian aboriginal account resonated with the early Shinto religions, this one strikes a chord in harmony with the early Hindu Upaniṣadic tradition, once it is set alongside it:

> 1. “Bring hither a fig from there.”
>
> “Here it is, sir.”
>
> “Divide it.”
>
> “It is divided, sir.”
>
> “What do you see there?”
>
> “These rather (*iva*) fine seeds, sir.”
>
> “Of these, please (*anga*), divide one.”
>
> “It is divided, sir.”
>
> “What do you see there?”
>
> “Nothing at all, sir.”
>
> 2. Then he said to him: “Verily, my dear, that finest essence which you do not perceive – verily, my dear, from that finest essence this great Nyagrodha (sacred fig) tree thus arises.
>
> 3. Believe me, my dear,” said he, “that which is the finest essence – this whole world has that as its soul. That is reality. That is Ātman (Soul). That art thou, Śvetaketu.”[39]

The accounts from the primal religions and what might be called the primal dimension of some of the so-called ethnic religions such as Shinto and Hinduism, which are also known for their association with “land” in their own way may be more diversified than we expected, but they are also less divided than they might appear on account of their common connection with nature.[40] This leads one to ask the question raised in the next section.

VI

What could this focus on nature possibly contribute to the concept of revelation in the philosophy of religion? Philosophy of religion in general employs three key categories in its discussion of revelation and its philosophical significance: God, Nature, and History. It sides with God and History over Nature. As one extends the scope of revelation to include other religions the role of Nature becomes more difficult to overlook. Even within the Abrahamic religions, Judaism with its commitment to Zion, retains a stronger link with Nature (land) closely tied to history though it be, links which become global in Christianity and Islam (though without the “sensory experience of the earth as a whole,”[41] as from outer space) and eschatological in Zoroastrianism. In Shinto the land is not offered by God to a people and hence “sacred,” as in Judaism but is sacred as the land of the Gods itself, rather than per se.[42] In Hinduism, remarkably, in its most standard formulation of the concept, there is a revelation but without a revealer.

> Then from where does it come? The answer is stark and simple: it is given with the world. For some of the Mīmāṃsā (or orthodox exegetical) thinkers who have addressed themselves to this problem, the world is beginningless and the assumption of a creator is both problematic and unnecessary. And even if a beginning of the world is assumed, as in later Hindu thought when it is held that the universe goes through a pulsating rhythm of origination, existence, and dissolution, it is also held that at the dawn of a new world the revelation reappears to the vision of the seers, who once more begin the transmission.
>
> Revelation, then, comes with the world, and it embodies the laws which regulate the well-being of both world and man.[43]

If these religions of revelation present one type of difficulty it seems to lie in viewing nature as instrumental – either as a divine means or means to the divine or an end divinely secured. On the other hand, the Taoist, Confucian (and when placed in that category) Shinto cultures "are characterized by what J.J.M. de Groot termed 'universism': a holiness, goodness and perfection of the natural order..."[44] This comes close to the primal position, as foreshadowed in the discussion of Shinto but the primal pattern remains different in that land is holy in and of itself and not necessarily as part of a universal system – natural or theological.

In primal religions, it seems, the revelation is made by the higher powers not as a person might speak words but as a potter might mould clay. The medium of revelation was not verbal language but material nature. "Once the spiritual vision of the cosmos is recognized, the [American] Indian attitude toward the land itself becomes understandable. The land was the gift of the domain of powerful beings. Certain locations, such as mountains and lakes, served as especially important points of contact with these spirits or forces."[45] The point to note is that such sacred places are not unknown in revealed religions, but in primal religions the shaping of the land itself, like that of words in a scripture, could constitute divine disclosure. The primal person can no more sell off the land than a Christian can sell the copyright to the Bible to a press. "Tecumseh and a few other great leaders had the vision of a whole continent given to *all* Indians, and epitomized the Indian feeling for land in the famous words, 'Sell the earth? Why not sell the air, the clouds, the great sea?'[46] In the realization of the land belonging to all Indians, do we hear an echo of the tribal God of Israel being transformed into the God of all human beings?"[47]

Primal revelation thus takes place through the lineaments of nature through not a verbal but plastic medium. Now the question arises: Who is the revealer? In theism God is the revealer. However, in the same breath as we assert that God is the revealer (and such revelation occurs *somewhere*)

we also assert that God is everywhere. If one can grab both the horns of this paradox then one can perform a Minoan somersault which vaults us to freedom over and beyond the charging bull in the china-shop of our philosophical wares, rather like D.H. Lawrence who wrote:

> It was a vast old religion, greater than anything we know: more darkly and nakedly religious. There is no God, no conception of a God. All is God. But it is not the pantheism we are accustomed to, which expresses itself as "God is everywhere, God is in everything." In this Indian religion everything is alive, not supernaturally, but naturally alive.[48]

Similarly God is eternal, but revelation is given at various points in time – whether propositional or non-propositional. Knud Rasmussen records the following remarks of a shaman from among the Eskimos who regarded Sila (Hila) as the supreme deity.

> Yes (I believe in) a power that we call Sila, which is not to be explained in simple words. A great spirit, supporting the world and the weather and all life on earth, a spirit so mighty that his utterance to mankind is not through common words, but by storm and snow and rain and the fury of the sea; all the forces of nature that men fear. But he has also another way of utterance, by sunlight , and the calm of the sea, and little children innocently at play, themselves understanding nothing. Children hear a soft and gentle voice, almost like that of a woman. It comes to them in a mysterious way, but so gently that they are not afraid, they only hear that some danger threatens. And the children mention it as it were casually when they come home, and it is then the business of the *angakog* (wizard) to take such measures as shall guard against the peril. When all is well Sila sends no message to mankind, but withdraws into his own endless nothingness apart. So he remains as long as men do not abuse life, but act with reverence towards their daily food.
>
> No one has seen Sila; his place of being is a mystery in that he is at once among us and unspeakably far away.[49]

VII

In the context of such a revelation the relationship of religion to life is another key element, and the point involves considerable subtlety. In fact it has to do with the definition of religion itself. In primal religion one does not distinguish the "religious" from the remainder or rest of life but this is what West feels culturally compelled to do, on account "of the theistic inheritance from Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The theistic form of belief in this tradition, even when downgraded culturally,"[50] as Winston L. King shrewdly observes, "is formative in the dichotomous Western view of religion" and "even Western thinkers who recognize their cultural bias find it hard to

escape, because the assumptions of theism permeate the linguistic structures that shape their thought."[51] These linguistic and cultural factors lead its subjects to distinguish between creator and creature, sacred and profane, and between the circle of believers and those outside it, so that "*religion* suggests both separation and a separative fellowship."[52]

Revelation does not seem to have these connotations in primal religion and in Hinduism. Again, Winston L. King addresses the issue with great subtlety:

> Many practical and conceptual difficulties arise when one attempts to apply such a dichotomous pattern across the board to all cultures. In primitive societies, for instance, what the West calls religious is such an integral part of the total ongoing way of life that it is never experienced or thought of as something separable or narrowly distinguishable from the rest of the pattern. Or if the dichotomy is applied to that multifaceted entity called Hinduism, it seems that almost everything can be and is given a religious significance by some sect. Indeed, in a real sense everything that is divine; existence *per se* appears to be sacred. It is only that the ultimately real manifests itself in a multitude of ways – in the set-apart and the ordinary, in god and so-called devil, in saint and sinner. The real is apprehended at many levels in accordance with the individual's capacity.[53]

The key lies in being able to distinguish the primal case from the Hindu and being able to trace the hair-line distinguishing them on the screen. We have tried to distinguish between attitudes to nature among those religions like Judaism, Hinduism, Shinto and the primal religions themselves and are in danger of getting lost in the trees by not seeing the wood. For the point to be pressed is not the distinction between attitudes to space but the contrast this presents to time as a factor in revelation.

This point comes into clear focus when we include the discussion of African traditional religion which is almost ready to boast, it seems, that it does not possess scripture or even sacred writings and that "African art provides a kind of scripture of African religion."[54] As for history, "Since people are so intimately bound up with their religious life and outlook," writes John S. Mbiti, "their history constitutes the history of their religion."[55] He then articulates how seamless this bond between religion and life is:

> Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion

> with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament. Although many African languages do not have a word for religion as such, it nevertheless accompanies the individual from long before his birth to long after his physical death. Through modern change these traditional religions cannot remain intact, but they are by no means extinct. In times of crisis they often come to the surface, or people revert to them in secret.

He continues:

> Traditional religions are not primarily for the individual, but for his community of which he is part. Chapters of African religions are written everywhere in the life of the community, and in traditional society there are no irreligious people. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. To be without one of these corporate elements of life is to be out of the whole picture. Therefore, to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion.[56]

Vine Deloria, Jr. carries the point further to its logical conclusion in differentiating between the two as fundamental modalities of revelation: temporal and spatial. He then sees a series of points flowing syllogistically, as it were, from the original premise. Temporal revelation, he tends to argue, devalues experience.[57]

> So too with one of the related concepts of monotheism, that of revelation.[58] In traditional terms a revelation occurs at a point in time, and succeeding generations are more dependent on their understanding of the original revelation than upon their immediate experience of deity. Almost all of the world religions are partially dependent on a revelation at some point in history. Contemporary people are more dependent on the validity of the original revelation of their religion in an educational sense than they are on their own immediate experience in a qualitative sense. For many religions this dependence means that belief replaces experience, and proofs of a logical nature are more relevant than additional revelations.[59]

Temporal revelation, according to Vine Deloria, Jr. not only places emphasis on faith (because it is a *past* event) rather than experience but it also changes with time, is individualistic in nature and (proselytizingly) universalistic by implication. "Revelations must somehow be phrased in the cultural beliefs, languages, and worldviews of the time in which they occurred. As times change and cultures become more sophisticated, sciences

come to present a broader view of the universe, and languages become infused with foreign words and concepts, and the original revelation also takes on a different aspect. Revelation has generally been considered as a specific body of truth related to a particular individual at a specific time. This glimpse into the eternal, as it were, is too often taken as universally valid for all times and places. If the universal nature of religions has not been the subject of debate, it should be our immediate concern."[60]

There are also other consequences, which flow as well, according to Vine Deloria, Jr. if a spatial rather than a temporal dimension is associated with revelation. He goes on to say: "In shifting from temporal concepts to spatial terms, we find that a revelation is not so much the period of time in which it occurs as the place it may occur. Revelation becomes a particular experience at a particular place, no universal truth emerging but an awareness arising that certain places have a qualitative holiness over and above other places. The universality of truth then becomes the relevance of the experience for a community of people, not its continual adjustment to evolving scientific and philosophical conceptions of the universe."[61]

However, space is in time only. That is to say, even the spatial expressions of revelation are subject to time. "Thus if in early Eolithic period, the sky is the supreme divinity; in the Paleolithic, the Master of Animals, and, in the Neolithic phase of the association of the productivity of the earth with fertility, the divinities took the form of a pair – the earth and the sky."[62] Such differentiation is identifiable even in the case of the Sky Gods themselves. Joseph Goetz has proposed: (1) that "Among the hunters, properly speaking... it is difficult to make out any idea of God,"[63] (2) that among "food gathering and pastoral societies"[64] one finds a Sky God who is "active and intervening in man's life."[65] and (3) that among planter-agriculturist groups one finds "an inactive, distant God"[66] so much so that "the myths themselves describe, as in Peruvian tradition, how the first men were destroyed because they could invoke no God but the Father in the Sky."[67] This corresponds well with the changing concepts of Yahweh in the context of the history of the Hebrews.[68]

Structurally, then, there are synesthetic similarities between temporal and spatial dimensions and what began to diverge also seems to start to converge. Could it be that the medium is not the message; that the same message is being delivered through different media? And what is the message?

VIII

Thus the primal contribution to the philosophy of religion on the point of revelation is to reveal it as a particular kind of *hierophany*, a manifestation of the sacred. It is this recognition or revelation as a subcategory of

hierophany in terms of primal religion – which, once made obvious, becomes obvious but remains obscured so long as the relation is not established. The movement in this direction is clear in the work of Mircea Eliade, although the claim may not have been made as emphatically as it is being made now. The clues Eliade provides consist of such statements as "we cannot be sure that there is *anything* – object, movement, psychological function, being or even a game – that has not at some time in human history been somewhere transformed into a hierophany."[69] Eliade goes on to cite a number of items, including, "too the essential words of the language"[70] (hence *mantras*?) but he still does not mention scriptural revelation. He almost hints that he treats "written texts" as a sphere from which the "scraps of evidence" of hierophany may be drawn, rather than considering the text *itself* as a sphere of hierophany. However a breakthrough comes with this comment: "One might even say that all hierophanies are simple prefigurations of the miracle of Incarnation, that every hierophany is an abortive attempt to reveal the mystery of the coming together of God and man."[71] He goes on to say: "Ockham, for instance, even went so far as to write: 'Est articulus fidei quod Deus assumpsit naturam humanam. Non includit contradictionem, Deus assumere naturam assinam. Pari ratione potest assumere lapidum aut lignum.' It does not, therefore, seem absurd in the least to study the nature of primitive hierophanies in the light of Christian theology: God is free to manifest himself under any form – even that of stone or wood. Leaving out for a moment the word 'God,' this may be translated as follows: the sacred may be seen under any sort of form, even the most alien. In fact, what is paradoxical, what is beyond our understanding, is not that the sacred can be manifested in stones or in trees, but that it can be manifested at all, that it can thus become limited and relative."[72] And then he concludes with this footnote: "One could attempt to vindicate the hierophanies which preceded the miracle of the Incarnation in the light of Christian teaching by showing their importance as a series of prefigurations of that Incarnation. Consequently, far from thinking of pagan religious ways (fetishes, idols and such) as false and degenerate stages in the religious feeling of mankind fallen in sin, now may see them as desperate attempts to prefigure the mystery of the Incarnation. The whole religious life of mankind – expressed in the dialectic of hierophanies – would, from this standpoint, be simply a waiting for Christ."[73]

The way is thus paved for the unhesitating acknowledgement of Christian revelation as a hierophany: "...Hierophanic moments of time are not restricted to cosmic rhythms of nature or biology. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, for example, human history is transfigured into a theophany. The manifestation of God in time guarantees the religious value of Christian images and symbols such as the cross, the holy mountain of calvary, and the cosmic tree."[74]

The following points emerge from viewing the concept of revelation through the prism of primal religions.

(1) Hierophany is the broadest general category. Hierophany is a mode of revelation just as theophany and kratophany are modes of hierophany.

(2) Non-propositional revelation fits the category of hierophany better than that of propositional revelation, as per the current usages of the term.

(3) Revelation may be categorized as propositional, non-propositional and sacral to accommodate all major modes of its manifestation in the religions of the world or else, it could be categorized as scriptural and nonscriptural.[75]

(4) The incarnatory description of Jesus Christ as fully human and divine is an attempt to rationalize the dialectical structure of the sacred by assimilation, whereas distinguishing the metaphysical and moral attributes of God in the same context, and regarding the Incarnation as an embodiment of the latter, represents a partial reversal of the process.

(5) Hierophanies can also be verbal although an oracle is not a scripture. Nevertheless, a comprehensive hierophany of natural components may be comparable to one of verbal components. "For the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, for example, the landscape of their native lands is alive. Its smallest details are charged with meanings revealed in myth. Because the sacred first appeared in those places (to guarantee a food supply and to teach humans how to feed themselves), they became an inexhaustible source of power and sacrality. Humans can return to these places in each generation, to commune with the power that has revealed itself here. In fact, the Aboriginal peoples express a religious need to remain in direct contact with those sites that are hierophanic."[76] In this respect the Qur'ān may be treated as a verbal hierophany. Its finality as a revelation, however breaks the cycle of comparison for hierophanies "capable of repeating themselves," unless the repeated readings of a text provide a parallel.

(6) The media of hierophany can change, just like the language of a scripture.

IX

To conclude: In a recent book Professor Wilfred Cantwell Smith asks the provocative question crucial to so many world religions, namely, what is scripture? And in a step which highlights the significance of the issue we are discussing he even makes that provocative question the title of the book itself.[77] Now we know how the question will be answered from the standpoint of the primal perspective on the philosophy of religion: it is a hierophany, a revelation of the sacred. One feels tempted to add: all scriptures are hierophanies but not all hierophanies are scriptures but perhaps one should resist this temptation.[78]

CHAPTER VII

THEORIES OF FAITH

The human reaction to revelation is faith, or lack of it. We discovered earlier "that the universe is religiously ambiguous – capable of being construed both religiously and naturalistically."[1] Revelation encourages us to construe it religiously but *it* cannot convince us that such is the case; only we can convince ourselves, hence the expression 'voluntarist theories of faith.' Seven ways of doing so have been proposed, both in the case of propositional and non-propositional views of revelation. Some of these proposals may now be examined.

One may begin, however, by making at least an initial case for the comparability of the phenomenon of faith in Christianity and primal cultures. E. Durkheim has devoted some attention to this issue in the context of his discussion of the Australian aboriginal ceremony known as *Intichiuma*, which is widely practised by the Aboriginal tribe with the objective of assuring "the prosperity of the animal or vegetable species serving the clan as totem."[2] After analyzing these and other rites he concludes:

> The true justification of religious practices does not lie in the apparent ends which they pursue, but rather in the invisible action which they exercise over the mind and in the way in which they affect our mental status. Likewise, when preachers undertake to convince, they devote much less attention to establishing directly and by methodical proofs the truth of any particular proposition or the utility of such and such an observance, than to awakening or reawakening the sentiment of the moral comfort attained by the regular celebration of the cult. Thus they create a predisposition to belief, which precedes proofs, which leads the mind to overlook the insufficiency of the logical reasons, and which thus prepares it for the proposition whose acceptance is desired. This favourable prejudice, this impulse towards believing, is just what constitutes faith; and *it is faith which makes the*

> *authority of the rites, according to the believer, whoever he may be, Christian or Australian*. The only superiority of the former is that he better accounts for the psychological process from which his faith results; he knows that "it is faith that saves."[3]

Faith and the Propositional Views of Revelation

One voluntarist theory of faith, associated with the propositional view of revelation, is connected with the name of Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) and is sometimes even referred to as Pascal's wager.

The theory can be presented in two steps. The first step consists in persuading oneself that it is safer to bet on the existence rather than the nonexistence of God. Once one has convinced oneself of this the second step come into play; that of convincing oneself then that God exists.

That it is safer wager to accept God's existence than to reject it is established by Pascal as follows: "If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is."[4] The point is that if we wager that God exists and He does, we gain all; and if we wager that He does not, and He does, we lose all. However, if we wager that He does no exist, and He does not, we lose nothing. Hence it is safer to bet that He does.

This leads us to the second step. If we ask whether it is possible to make oneself believe in God, Pascal answers that this *is* possible – not indeed instantaneously, but by a course of treatment. "You would like to attain faith, and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief, and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you...Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said etc. Even this will naturally make you believe, and deaden your acuteness."[5]

Let us see if the logic of this voluntarist theory of faith could be applied to primal religions. At one level it is clear that it does, for it is a wager about the existence of God and now that the existence of an authentic and independent belief in God in several primal religions has been accepted, though not without struggle, Pascal's wager would apply to their case. This is obvious. What is less obvious is whether Pascal's line of reasoning has been consciously advocated (as distinguished from being unconsciously employed) in primal cultures.

Its applicability, however, can be tested at another level of primal culture, for instance, by applying it to "the idea that by imitating an animal, one causes it to reproduce."[6] Should the primal hunter repose faith in this idea, à la Pascal? I think it is easy to see that one should. Whether such mimetic magic works or not we don't know: but if we wager that it works, we gain

all; and if we lose, we lose nothing, for no hunt would have come our way anyway. Thus although Pascal's wager has been criticised for its "calculating and self-regarding attitude,"[7] it is clear that it is applicable to primal religions, although we do not know whether it was so applied.

Another voluntarist theory of faith has been proposed by William James (1942-1910). James makes the point that although the issue of the existence of God cannot be conclusively settled on the basis of *evidence*; it is qualitatively different from other such cases, wherein we might comfortably persist in a state of suspended belief on account of its *importance*. He writes:

> We cannot escape the issue by remaining skeptical and waiting for more light, because, although we do avoid error in that way *if religion be untrue*, we lose the good, *if it be true*, just as certainly as if we positively chose to disbelieve.[8]

He elaborates his position as follows:

> *Better risk loss of truth than chance of error* – that is your faith-vetoer's exact position. He is actively playing his stake as much as the believer is; he is backing the field against the religious hypothesis, just as the believer is backing the religious hypothesis against the field. To preach scepticism to us as a duty until "sufficient evidence" for religion be found, is tantamount therefore to telling us, when in presence of the religious hypothesis, that to yield to our fear of its being error is wiser and better than to yield to our hope that it may be true...Dupery for dupery, what proof is there that dupery through hope is so much worse than dupery through fear? I, for one, can see no proof; and I simply refuse obedience to the scientist's command to imitate his kind of option, in a case where my own stake is important enough to give me the right to choose my own form of risk.[9]

The example he cites to illustrate his point is noteworthy both for its elegance and relevance: "...just as a man who in a company of gentlemen made no advances, asked a warrant for every concession, and believed no one's word without proof, would cut himself off by such churlishness from all the social rewards that a more trustworthy spirit would earn – so here, one who would shut himself up in snarling logicality and try to make the gods extort his recognition willy-nilly, or not get it at all, might cut himself off forever from his only opportunity of making the gods's acquaintance."[10]

John Hick criticises William James' theory strongly. According to him: "The basic weakness of James's position is that it constitutes an unrestricted license for wishful thinking...It amounts to an encouragement to us all to believe, at our own risk, whatever we like. However, if our aim is to believe what is *true* and not necessarily what we *like*, James's universal permissiveness will not help us."[11]

It appears that John Hick is too severe on William James. William James does not seem to be advocating the acceptance of any belief at random; he seems rather to be pointing to the dangers of disregarding *belief* in a context of "live option," that is, an existential framework, which could, if true, have very positive consequences, an opportunity which should not be overlooked just because it involves an element of *faith* or because the individual is initially unable to generate enough faith to believe in it.

Wilhelm Dupré emphasizes this live context in the case of primal religions in the context of such a discussion, when he points out that 'meaning' in such situations

> comes forth as the meaning of personal being, and thus, has to be taken as such. If one of these two poles – the sacred in its mythology relation (that is, the sacred in connotation with holy and whole) or the personal task (that is, the sacred in connotation with well-being and personal health) – is suppressed, it can be expected that the human response to the demands of beginning and end deteriorates either into meaningless though rational and socially effective manipulation of mythological associations, or into the equally meaningless attitude of agnostic mysticism and self-complacent rationalism.[12]

It is quite conceivable that a modern-day member of a primal tradition who decides to stand by or to revert to his or her heritage, without being certain of its veridical quality may be acting in accordance with William James suggestion when the *stake is so high* as the continuance of the very existence of that tradition.

Yet another conception of faith is represented by the thought of F.R. Tennant (1866-1957). It consists of three key points: the difference between faith and belief is the first. This difference is explained by him as follows:

> Belief is more or less constrained by fact or Actuality that already is or will be, independently of any striving of ours, and which convinces us. Faith, on the other hand, reaches beyond the Actual or the given to the ideally possible, which in the first instance it creates, as the mathematician posits his entities, and then by practical activity may realize or bring into Actuality. Every machine of human invention has thus come to be. Again, faith may similarly lead to knowledge of Actuality which it in no sense creates, but which would have continued, in absence of the faith-venture, to be unknown; as in the discovery of America by Columbus.[13]

The second point is his claim that science and religion converge inasmuch as they alike require "the venture of faith," for faith "always involves" risks.

> Science postulates what is requisite to make the world amenable to the kind of thought that conceives of the structure of the universe, and its orderedness according to quantitative law; theology, and sciences of valuation, postulate

> what is requisite to make the world amenable to the kind of thought that conceives of the why and wherefore, the meaning or purpose of the universe, and its orderedness according to teleological principles.[14]

The third point indicates the different ways in which such faith is verified in the two domains. In science the verification "...consists in finding that the postulate or theory is borne out by appeal to external facts and tallies with them,"[15] while in religion "...is illustrated by numerous examples of the gaining of material and moral advantages, the surmounting of trials and affliction, and the attainment of heroic life, by men of old who were inspired by faith. It is thus that faith is pragmatically 'verified' and that certitude as to the unseen is established."[16] Tennant does not lose sight of the fact, as Hick notes, that such verification is 'subjective' in the case of religion and 'objective' in the case of science.[17]

In applying this concept of faith to the primal religions, one may want to distinguish between religion and magic on the basis of that their success applies respectively to the subjective and objective domains, especially with Frazer in mind who, as Charles Long states, 'disentangles' the two by relating religion to conscious moral agents and magic to the "operation of immutable laws acting mechanically,"[18] if we are prepared to regard magic as a form of proto-science.[19]

One of the most influential conceptualizations of faith in modern times is that of Paul Tillich (1886-1965) whose famous expression of it as "ultimate concern" has passed into the currency of modern religious studies, where it is often used to define religion in some way. Tillich described this "ultimate concern" as not only ultimate but also "unconditional" and "total." When the question arose as to whether this ultimacy applied to the attitude or the object of the attitude he collapsed the two by declaring that: "The ultimate of the act of faith and the ultimate that is meant in the act of faith are one and the same, thereby dissolving the subject-object dichotomy."[20]

At this point Lévy-Bruhl's view of the 'primitive mentality' becomes relevant, although he subsequently retracted it. It becomes relevant because it associates the primitive mentality with the mystical participation of these two poles. However, a now much more widely acceptable portrait of primal religion is provided by Wilhelm Dupré:

> With respect to primitive cultures, the following picture can be given of the religious situation of man. As a being able to ask, to speak and to understand, man necessarily lives in a world of symbols. He shares them with mankind in general and with his life-community in particular. Throughout the process of symbolization, the symbols become necessary as mediatory instances of the realization of interpersonal relations and the person alike. Since the world of symbols is bound together in the process of homogenesis and is not

> merely the sum total of coexisting entities, a definite structure can be discovered in the general texture of symbolization. As a result, religion appears as a differential universality in a cluster of aspects that refer to the absolute character of the symbolic and of life. The mediatory dimension of the symbolic reality of man is in turn concentrated in the mythic unity as the absolute foundation for thought and action.

He then proceeds to examine the nature of this unity as follows:

> It is a unity that while connecting the individuals in their life-community opposes them in the distinctness of their personal uniqueness. In its theoretical as well as practical reality, the mythic unity reveals an immanent dynamism (*coincidentia mythica*). This brings man into a decisive relation with the final outlook of this dynamism, that is, with the God-person and, consequently, with the God-person in relation to man and world (religious symbolism). Religion becomes manifest as a primary datum of culture. Its initial realization as primitive religion is founded in the theogonic consciousness or the personal existence of man and is challenged throughout the processes of social togetherness and cultural survival. In its emergence in many religious phenomena, primitive religion is, like culture itself, subject to translative and alternative developments. It is opposed by its magical mirror image, where the same symbols are understood as if they were substances of the empirical world (hypostasized hypostases) and where the same symbolic acts are performed as it they were efficacious in themselves.[21]

Faith and the Nonpropositional Views of Revelation

While discussing faith in the context of the propositional view of revelation we noticed that the universe as we find it is ambiguous in terms of a religious or naturalistic explanation. A voluntaristic act of faith was required to overcome this ambiguity. The nonpropositional view of revelation, known more formally as the *heilsgeschichtliche* view, presents a similar ambiguity regarding whether God has actually come "within the orbit of human experience by acting in history,"[22] for the evidence on the point is not decisive either way.

The cue for the theory of faith developed in this context is provided by the experience of ordinary life. "In ordinary nonreligious experience, there is something epistemologically similar to this in the phenomenon of 'seeing as' which was brought to the attention of philosophers by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) when he pointed out the epistemological interest of puzzle pictures. Consider, for example, the page covered with apparently random dots and lines, which, as one gazes at it, suddenly takes the form of a picture of (say) human beings standing in a grove of trees. The entire field of dots

and lines is now seen as having this particular kind of significance and no longer as merely a haphazard array of marks."[23]

John Hick develops his view of faith in the context of a nonpropositional view of revelation on the model of "*seeing-as*" into "*experiencing-as*," as follows:

> We can develop this idea and suggest that in addition to such purely visual interpreting, there is also the more complex phenomenon of *experiencing as*, in which a whole situation is experienced as having some specific significance. A familiar example of a situation that is perceived with all the senses and has its own practical significance is that of driving an automobile along a highway. To be conscious of being in this particular kind of situation is to be aware that certain reactions (and dispositions to react) are appropriate and others inappropriate; an important part of our consciousness of the situation as having the character that it has consists in our readiness to act appropriately within it. Anyone would react in characteristically different ways in the midst of a battle and on a quiet Sunday afternoon stroll; a person would do so in recognition of the differing characters of these two types of situation. Such awareness is a matter of "experiencing as." The significance of a given situation for a given observer consists primarily of its bearing upon that person's behavioral dispositions. Being an interpretative act, "experiencing as" can of course be mistaken, as – to mention an extreme case – when a mentally-ill person feels that everyone poses a threat, and reacts accordingly.[24]

Thus "two different orders or levels of significance could be experienced within the same situation."[25] It is easy to see how this view could be applied in the context of faith with a nonpropositional view of revelation.

> The same epistemological pattern – the interpreting in a distinctive way of events that are in themselves capable of being construed either naturalistically or religiously – runs through the New Testament. Here again, in the story of a man, Jesus of Nazareth, and a movement which arose in connection with him, there are ambiguous data. It is possible to see him simply as a self-appointed prophet who got mixed up in politics, clashed with the Jerusalem priesthood, and had to be eliminated. It is also possible, with the New Testament writers, to see him as the Messiah of God giving himself for the renewing of humankind. To see him in this way is to share the faith or the distinctive way of 'experiencing as' which gave rise to the New Testament documents.[26]

How does this view of faith apply to primal religions?

To examine this possibility it might be useful to revert to the original example of *seeing-as*, which was developed by John Hick along the lines outlined earlier. Let us remind ourselves then that "A certain assemblage of

lines, curves, dots, etc., can be seen as a duck, a rabbit, or just as a complex configuration representing nothing in particular, depending on how we look, but all these possibilities are there to be viewed. They are not relative to us *per se*, that is, what is relative to us is not the fact that we see a rabbit, it is rather that we see the *whole thing as a rabbit rather than as a duck*, both of which are genuine possibilities, the given being what it is."[27]

This review suggests that primal religions could be one way of *experiencing* the universe *as* something religious, just as other religions could be. The fact then that magical techniques *sometimes do not work* would fit the pattern of ambiguity as it might of science as well. That the principle of *experiencing-as* is then capable of a wider application than given to it by John Hick emerges like a submerged whale from the ocean as one peruses the following comment of Durkheim on the *Intichiuma* ceremony referred to earlier.

> If the intermittent failures of the Intichiuma do not shake the confidence of the Australian in his rite, it is because he holds with all the strength of his soul to these practices in which he periodically recreates himself; he could not deny their principle without causing an upheaval of his own being, which resists. But howsoever great this force of resistance may be, it cannot radically distinguish religious mentality from the other forms of human mentality, even those which are the most habitually opposed to it. In this connection, that of a scholar differs from the preceding only in degree. When a scientific law has the authority of numerous and varied experiments, it is against all method to renounce it too quickly upon the discovery of a fact which seems to contradict it. It is still necessary to make sure that the fact does not allow of a single interpretation, and that it is impossible to account for it without abandoning the proposition which it seems to invalidate.[28]

John Hick's more limited application, however, is not without its relevance to primal religions. The idea of the "absence," that is, palpably unprovable presence of God is an important theme in Christian thought. As John Hick points out:

> This theme of God as *deus absconditus*, the hidden God who comes to men in the incognito of a human life in order to preserve people's freedom, is found in Martin Luther and is expressed with great clarity by Pascal: It was not then right that He should appear in a manner manifestly divine, and completely capable of convincing all men; but it was also not right that He should come in so hidden a manner that He could not be known by those who should sincerely seek Him. He has willed to make Himself quite recognizable by those; and thus, willing to appear openly to those who seek Him with all their heart, and to be hidden from those who flee from Him with all their heart, He so regulates the knowledge of Himself that He has given signs of Himself, visible to those who seek Him, and not to those who

> seek Him not. There is enough light for those who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition.[29]

Could not the phenomenon of *deus remotus* be interpreted similarly: as the creation of sufficient epistemic distance by the Supreme Being[30] to give free play to human response in relation to faith, after that God had been too close for comfort[31] to the world?

CHAPTER VIII

EVIDENTIALISM, FOUNDATIONALISM AND RATIONAL BELIEF

The Limits of Proof

The discussion of evidence, proof and rationality in the philosophy of religion is strongly coloured, for obvious reasons, by the history of Western thought. That is to say, the controlling assumptions of Western philosophy have naturally provided the paradigms for the philosophy of religion in this respect.

From this point of view three facts stand out for special attention. The first of these has to do with the *epistemological bases* of philosophy, as it has been practised in the West. From this point of view, Western

> philosophy recognizes two ways in which human beings may come to know whatever there is to be known. One way (stressed by empiricism) is through experience, and the other (stressed by rationalism) is through reasoning. The limitation of the rationalist way is that the only truths capable of being strictly proved are analytic and ultimately tautological. We cannot by logic alone demonstrate any matters of fact and existence; these must be known through experience. That two and two equal four can be certified by strict proof; but that we live in a world of objects in space, and that there is this table and that oak tree and those people, are facts that could never be known independently of sense perception. If nothing were given through experience in its various modes, we should never have anything to reason about. This is as true in religion as in other fields. If God exists, God is not an idea but a reality outside us; in order to be known to men and women, God must therefore become manifest in some way within their experience.[1]

The second fact which stands out for special attention is the relative *epistemological dominance* of rationalism in Western thought in its formative phase in the modern period. This dominance is often traced back to the influential role of René Descartes (1596-1650) and "the still popular idea that to know means to be able to prove is a legacy of this tradition."[2] The rationalist approach, as represented by Descartes, tried to first fix "an immovable point of certainty" amidst a world in which everything was open to doubt, and strove to then derive further certainties form it. For Descartes there was "one such indubitable item, namely, the fact that I who am now doubting exist: *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). Building upon this immovable pinpoint of certainty, Descartes tried to establish, first the existence of God and then, through the argument that God would not allow us to be deceived, the veracity of sense perception."[3]

One of the main differences between the rationalist and empiricist approaches concerns their starting-point: namely, whether one starts by doubting the reality of the physical world. Descartes' thinking was imbued with the full weight of a thoroughgoing scepticism. Thus he was reluctant to trust the senses because one could be deceived by one's senses. He was reluctant to trust even the mind, as a demon could tamper with it. He therefore chose to commence his reasoning from a point which could not be doubted (namely, our doubting!), while urging us to "doubt everything which could without self-contradiction be doubted"[4] to obtain maximum certainty for our results.

As noted earlier, it was the fact that "one doubts" which alone was identified as ultimately immune to scepticism. The empiricist tradition in Western thought questions this, for ultimately, according to it, there is no "escape from a self-imposed state of Cartesian doubt. For the possibility that the 'malicious demon' exists and has power over our minds undermines all proofs, since that demon can (by tampering with our memories) make us believe an argument to be valid that is in fact not valid. Really radical and total doubt can never be reasoned away, since it includes even our reasoning powers within its scope. The only way of escaping such doubt is to avoid falling into it in the first place."[5]

Thus philosophers such as G.E. Moore (1873-1958) took this view that doubting on so grand a scale is actually no longer rational but perverse, for, as noted earlier, it is the experience of the world which provides the basic material for the exercise of reason.

This relative dominance of rationalism until recent times had negative implications for the study of primal thought because it meant that one began its study by first rejecting the primal worldview, or at least by subjecting it to doubt, and then tried to retrieve what was left – the flotsam and jetsam after the shipwreck, as it were. Given the penchant for art in the primal

religious tradition Jamake Highwater presents the primal perspective on Cartesian thinking as follows: "When we see the Franz Hals portrait of Descartes we should think of Hals and not of Descartes."[6] The rationalist debasement of primal religions is now recognised by many scholars of primal religions, as for instance by Geoffrey Parrinder, who was cited in the Introduction.[7]

The third *epistemological fact* which stands out for special attention is the fact that the "empiricist reasoning is in agreement with the unformulated epistemological assumptions of the Bible." By empiricist reasoning here is meant the line of thought embodied in a passage such as the following: "if the word 'real' has any meaning for us, we must acknowledge standard or paradigm cases of its correct use. We must be able to point to a clear and unproblematic instance of something's being real. What can this be but some ordinary physical object perceived by the senses? But if tables and chairs and houses and people are accepted as paradigm cases of real objects, it becomes self-contradictory to suggest that the whole world of tables and chairs and houses and people may possibly be unreal. By definition, they are not unreal, for they are typical instances of what we mean by real objects."[8] And the expression "unformulated epistemological assumptions of the Bible" refers to the fact that

> Instead of professing to establish the reality of God by philosophical reasoning, the Bible takes God's reality for granted. Indeed, to the biblical writers it would have seemed absurd to try to prove by logical argument that God exists, for they were convinced that they were already having to do with God, and God with them, in all the affairs of their lives. God was known to them as a dynamic will interacting with their own wills – a sheer given reality, as inescapably to be reckoned with as destructive storm and life-giving sunshine, or the hatred of their enemies and the friendship of their neighbors.[9]

John Hick therefore points out the limits of proof one runs into in the present context as follows:

> It is clear, then, that from the point of view of a faith that is biblical in its orientation, the traditional "theistic proofs" are religiously irrelevant. Even if God could be validly inferred from universally accepted premises, this fact would be of merely academic interest to people who believe that they exist in personal relationship with God and already know God as a living presence.[10]

If the study of biblical religion brings us face to face with the limits of proof, then primal religion brings us face to face with the limits of reason. It finds its saviour not so much in the empiricist movement in Western thought as the Romantic movement[11], and even more in modern and post-modern thought:

> The researches of Freud, Jung, Darwin, Frazer, Einstein, and many other pioneers of a new mentality largely rejected the neat patterns of nature as conceived by Descartes. Such highly diverse philosophers as Henri Bergson (1859) and Martin Heidegger (1889) became determined for the first time in the history of the West to *take the great leap beyond reason in order to see how reason itself might look from the outside* – that is, form the point of view of some other potential of comprehension granted the human animal. What such philosophers were proposing in the early 1900s was a new interpretation of reason and its various operations. For the next seventy-five years the fundamental way we think about the world was drastically altered by the radical and persuasive doctrines of Phenomenology and Existentialism particularly. Then, starting about 1940, science also broke out of the Aristotelian cosmos. Thus philosophy had changed the way we think about the world and science was changing the way we see the world.[12]

It is this change in the way we see the world which has opened up our eyes to the primal world, for it made one aware of the limits of reason. In this respect the role of science has been as significant as that of philosophy. While Western thought was under the dominance of rationalism, Western science represented the alliance of the rational and empirical methods. In a sense, although religion and science carried on an intellectual feud within Western culture, as part of the West both had a negative impact on primal religion, but Western religion more that Western science.

Rational Belief Without Proofs

We may revert to a consideration of the present state of the philosophy of religion, before adverting to a consideration of primal religions in its light or trying to see what light primal religions throw on it.

Once the rationalist identification of rationality with proof and evidence has been set aside, room is created for examining the possibility of rational belief without proofs. This line of argument has been developed by Alvin Plantinga and William Alston and integrated in the general body of the philosophy of religion by John Hick.

Three concepts are crucial for a proper understanding of this mode of reasoning: (1) basicality or basic beliefs; (2) proper basicality or proper basic beliefs and (3) foundational beliefs.

Certain beliefs may be held to be true without adducing proof that they are. Such beliefs are basic beliefs. They are called basic because belief in them is not based on conformity to the rationalist model: evidence – inference – belief.[13] The belief that I possess eyes or a hand arises directly from evidence. It will be absurd to doubt that I can see; but the establishment

of this belief did not presuppose producing evidence. It I were to try to convince someone that I can see, I will not be seeing because I reason; I will be reasoning because I see. Or to put it another way: I do not infer that I possess eyes because I see; neither do I infer I see because I possess eyes. Put positively, I possess eyes as I can see, and I can see as I possess eyes. It may not be possible to "establish this in any noncircular way, but...it is nevertheless rational for us to assume it and to live on the basis of it."[14] Modern thinkers have identified several kinds of beliefs which are basic beliefs in this sense, of which the most obvious examples, given earlier, are perceptual beliefs. However,

> Perceptual beliefs are by no means the only examples of rationally held beliefs that are not based upon evidence. Other types include believing in self-evident propositions (e.g., "there is a world"), analytic truths (e.g., "2 + 2 = 4"), and uncontroversial reports of your own memory (e.g., "I had breakfast this morning"), and also the holding of incorrigible beliefs – i.e. beliefs which, when sincerely held, cannot be mistaken, such as "I am now conscious" or "I feel pain in my jaw." Such beliefs, arising in us directly and not as a result of inference, are often described as basic.[15]

For such basic beliefs to be properly basic beliefs, however, they must meet other criteria. As John Hick explains:

> Perceptual belief is basic, then, in that it is not derived from other beliefs but is directly grounded in our experience. But obviously not any and every experience can justify a basic belief, so that it exhibits, in Plantinga's phrase, proper basicality. The experience must be relevant to the belief in such a way that the belief appropriately reflects and is grounded in the experience. Further, to conclude that a belief *is* properly basic still does not establish its truth. Sense-perception beliefs, for example, although basic and although appropriately and justifiably held, can nevertheless be mistaken; for there are hallucinations, mirages, and misperceptions. Likewise memory beliefs, however uncontroversial, can also be mistaken. Thus the question whether a particular belief is basic for someone is not identical with the question whether it is *properly* basic for that person, and this in turn is not identical with the question whether the proposition believed is *true*.[16]

The next step may be taken by reverting to the example of the belief that I possess eyes. How would I know that my belief is in fact true? I may look at my eyes in a mirror. My eyes are implicated in visual perception and that very visual perception provides their proof is one dimension of the situation. But now we are concerned with another dimension: that we have assumed the validity of sense perception *in general* in adopting this procedure. "And so the ultimate question then arises: How do we know that the whole realm of sense experience is not delusory – that it consists of nothing but our own

subjective states of consciousness? The answer seems to be that we cannot establish this in any noncircular way, but that it is nevertheless rational for us to assume it and to live on the basis of it; and indeed, more strongly, that it would be *positively irrational not to*. In other words, we have come here to something that is for us truly foundational, something that we just have to accept as a basis both for judgments about the veridical or delusory character of particular perceptions and for our thought and action generally."[17]

The final step consists in recognizing precisely the distinction between the particular beliefs (possessing eyes) and the general belief implied by them (in sense perception in this case).

> We are thus led to distinguish between *particular perceptual* beliefs (such as the belief that a person sees a tree in front of her) and our *general belief* in the normally veridical rather than delusory character of sense experience. This latter is equivalent to the assumption that there is a real world of which we are a part and which impinges upon us through our sense organs. Thus if we describe as *basic* such beliefs as "I see a tree before me" (with its immediate implication that "There is a tree there"), it would be useful to have a different term for the deeper foundation on which all such beliefs rest, namely our general assumption that through our senses we are interacting with a real physical environment. Let us describe this latter belief as *foundational*.[18]

What have we gained through this exercise? What we have done by undertaking this exercise is to make room for the suggestion that "Corresponding to the foundational belief in the reality of the physical world, of which we are aware in sense experience," we may propose a "foundational belief in the reality of the Divine, of which we are aware in religious experience."[19]

Basic Religious Beliefs

John Hick pushes the analogy to its logical conclusion when he writes:

> And corresponding to particular sensory beliefs, such as "I see a tree before me," are particular beliefs reflecting moments or sequences of religious experience, such as "I am conscious in this situation of being in God's presence." *But the distinction between basic and foundational beliefs is more important in relation to religion than to sense experience*. For whereas the foundational belief in the material world can only be artificially doubted, the parallel foundational belief in a transcendent reality or realities can be, and is, seriously doubted.[20]

For the moment, however, the consideration of this important distinction may be bracketed in the interest of considering an obvious objection: are not such beliefs groundless?

Plantinga has argued that neither basic perceptual beliefs etc. nor basic religious beliefs are groundless, on the following grounds.

> Suppose we consider perceptual beliefs, memory beliefs, and beliefs ascribing mental states to other persons, such beliefs as:
>
> I see a tree,
> I had breakfast this morning, and
> That person is in pain.
>
> Although beliefs of this sort are typically taken as basic, it would be a mistake to describe them as *groundless*. Upon having experience of a certain sort, I believe that I am perceiving a tree. In the typical case I do not hold this belief on the basis of other beliefs; it is nonetheless not groundless...We could say, if we wish, that this experience is what justifies me in holding [the belief]; this is the *ground* of my justification, and, by extension, the ground of the belief itself.[21]

The same, pari passu, applies to religious beliefs according to Plantinga.

> Now similar things may be said about belief in God. When the Reformers claim that this belief is properly basic, they do not mean to say, of course, that there are no justifying circumstances for it, or that it is in that sense groundless or gratuitous. Quite the contrary. Calvin holds that God "reveals and daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe," and the divine art "reveals itself in the innumerable and yet distinct and well ordered variety of the heavenly host." God has so created us that we have a tendency or disposition to see his hand in the world about us. More precisely, there is in us a disposition to believe propositions of the sort *this flower was created by God* or *this vast and intricate universe was created by God* when we contemplate the flower or think about the vast reaches of the universe.
>
> Those who believe in God on the basis of their religious experience – experiences that they take to be of God's love, forgiveness, claim, presence, and so on – are rationally justified in so believing.[22]

Foundational Religious Beliefs

The vital point, deferred for consideration earlier, may now be taken up. The problem, it will be recalled, is, that the relationship between basic perceptual beliefs etc. and foundational beliefs seems to be more secure, than between basic religious beliefs and foundational religious beliefs. William Alston has

used the expression M-beliefs[23] where M. stands for manifestation, for basic religious beliefs. In these terms it is the staggering variety of M-beliefs which renders their relationship to a foundational religious belief suspect, and in fact therefore belief in them also suspect.

William Alston points out three features of what we might call NR basic beliefs (nonreligious basic beliefs i.e. perceptual beliefs, etc.) which distinguish them from religious beliefs. If we take sensory experience as a paradigm case for NR basic beliefs then these three features may be identified in the following way: (1) sense experience is universal among human beings, religious experience is not; (2) the conceptual scheme used for objectifying sensory experience is common to normal adult human beings but this does not seem to be the case with religious experience and (3) beliefs of sensory experience can be checked and confirmed by observation etc. But no such procedures seem to exist for religious beliefs.

At this point William Alston makes a radical suggestion: that these differences arise from the fact that the world of God differs precisely in these respects from the material world. He writes:

> Suppose that (a) God is too different from created beings, too "wholly other," for us to be able to grasp any regularities in His behavior. Suppose further that (b) for the same reasons we can only attain the faintest, sketchiest, and most insecure grasp of what God is like. Finally, suppose that (c) God has decreed that a human being will be aware of His presence in any clear and unmistakable fashion only when certain special and difficult conditions are satisfied.[24]

As John Hick goes on to explain:

> The *first* of these three points suggests why we cannot check up on the supposed divine activity as we can on the behavior of matter. For insofar as we understand the workings of the natural world we can learn to predict changes occurring in it. In contrast to this, since we do not understand God's infinite nature, we cannot expect to predict the forms that the divine activity will take. The *second* point suggests why different human groups have come to conceive of and experience God in such different ways. For it could be that the humanly variable element in cognition naturally produces significant differences in our awareness of the Divine. Finally, the *third* point suggests why it is that some people do whilst others do not participate in one of the streams of religious experience. For if we are not compelled to be conscious of God, but are cognitively free in relation to our Creator, it is not surprising that at any given time some are while some are not aware of God. These considerations, formulated by Alston in theistic terms, could be given analogous expression in nontheistic religious terms.[25]

One may therefore conclude that "It is thus possible that religious experience differs from sense experience in just the ways that it ought to,

given the fundamental differences between their objects. These differences thus do not, in themselves constitute a reason for denying that religious experience may be a cognitive response to a transcendent reality."[26]

The Risk of Belief

The foregoing discussion goes far towards establishing that religious beliefs are not groundless. John Hick concludes from this discussion that "those who participate in one of the great historic streams of religious experience, accepting the body of beliefs in which it is reflected and proceeding to live on that basis, are not open to any charge of irrationality. They are, in Plantinga's phrases, not violating any epistemic duties, or forming a defective intellectual structure, but are entirely within their *epistemic rights*."[27]

What about the primal religious tradition, one is inclined to wonder? Are they also not within their own epistemic rights in believing as they do? S. Radhakrishnan points out:

> If the Hindu chants the Vedas on the banks of the Ganges, if the Chinese meditates on the Analects, if the Japanese worships the image of Buddha, if the European is convinced of Christ's mediatorship, if the Arab reads the Qur'an in his mosque, and if the African bows down to a fetish, each one of them has exactly the same reason for his particular confidence. Each form of faith appeals in precisely the same way to the inner certitude and devotion of its followers. It is their deepest apprehension of God and God's fullest revelation to them. The claim of any religion to validity is the fact that only through it have its followers become what they are.[28]

Conclusion

The general issue thus remains an open one, both between the secular and religious worldviews and within the religious worldviews. One must, therefore, set alongside Thomas Hobbes's remark that 'when a man tells me that God spoke to him in a dream,' this "is no more than to say that he dreamed God spake to him,"[29] the following wistful comment of Coleridge: "If a man could pass through paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he awoke, ay, what then!"[30]

CHAPTER IX

LANGUAGE AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Language, Cognition and Religion: The Case of East Africa

John S. Mbiti has argued that for the proper understanding of the primal religious tradition of Kenya, it is necessary to understand the concept of time with which it operates. And to understand this concept of time one must analyse the verb tenses of at least some of the languages used in this area. This exercise is then carried out by him in relation to the Akamba and Gikuyu languages in Kenya, though the *results* are presented with the help of Swahili terms.[1] The conclusions reached by him are summarized below. Professor Mbiti's explanation of the African Concept of time briefly runs as follows:

> Time in the African mind is not similar to the Western concept of time. In the West, time has three significant phases *past-present-future*, and time moves from the past to the future. In Africa, time has two dimensions, a long *past* and the felt present and hardly any future except that which covers maybe six months to two years at most. And there time moves from present to past. The two dimensions are named *Zamani* and *Sasa*. Both are Kiswahili words which meant "past" and "present." The term *Sasa* covers all that is present plus the short future of up to two years. Professor Mbiti makes no mention of the Kiswahili word *Siku Sijazo* 'future.' An explanation of how much the term *Siku-Sijazo* covers would have been necessary.
>
> In the African Concept of time, there is no thinking in abstraction about time, according to Professor Mbiti. Time is measured in terms of events. And since there are as yet ontologically no events in the future, the future

> dimension of time is, he argues, absolutely absent in the African Concept of time, and even the languages themselves have no verb tenses expressing the future dimension of time.[2]

John S. Mbiti goes on to point out how this linguistic feature is consequential in terms of religious beliefs. As a result of it the 'eschaton' shifts its temporal location from the future to the past in the African religion of the region where these languages are spoken. Although the relevant passage was cited earlier in another context, it needs to be considered again in the present context:

> Each African people has its own history. This history moves 'backward' from the Sasa period to the Zamani, from the moment of intense experience to the period beyond which nothing can go. In traditional African thought, there is no concept of history moving 'forward' towards a future climax, or towards an end of the world. Since the future does not exist beyond a few months, the future cannot be expected to usher in a golden age, or a radically different state of affairs from what is in the Sasa and Zamani. The notion of a messianic hope, or a final destruction of the world, has no place in traditional concept of history. So African peoples have no 'belief in progress,' the idea that the development of human activities and achievements move from a low to a higher degree. The people neither plan for the distant future nor 'build castles in the air.' The centre of gravity for human thought and activities is the Zamani period, toward which the Sasa moves. People set their eyes on the Zamani, since for them there is no 'world to Come,' such as is found in Judaism and Christianity.[3]

Language, Cognition and Religion: The Case of the Wintu Indians

The Wintu Indians live in northern California and live by gathering food. However, they "do not consider their abundance of food as simply a product of nature; beliefs about the sources of food are intricately interwoven with their religious perception of the world."[4] Their most important annual festival is called Hesi, the date for which is set by a shaman. At the height of the ceremonial the shaman addresses cosmic matters, especially when he dons a "sacred cloak to become a figure known as *moki*," who "while not a mythic figure was recognized as a messenger from *katit*, keeper of the abode of the dead."[5] In this the Wintu way of life is similar to many primal cultures.

What is remarkable for our purposes is the fact that the Wintu language has no nominal plural form, so that "when they do use a plural word, such as *men*, they use a root completely different from the singular word. Man is *wita* and men is *gis*."[6] This also enables them to "speak of deer or salmon

without any distinction in regard to number, to a member of this tribe a flock or a herd is a singular whole, it is not a collection of individual elements. To Western people the distinction of number is so essential to their thinking that they do not mention an object without also indicating whether it is singular or plural; and it they refer to it in the present tense, the verb always reflects the number."[7]

The implications of such a language for cognition have been identified by Dorothy Lee. She begins by observing how difficult this grammatical procedure is for an Indo-European to grasp:

> To someone brought up in the Indo-European tradition, this is a position hard to understand. We know that the plural is derived from the singular. It is logical and natural for our grammars to start with the singular form of a noun or a verb, and then go on to the plural.[8]

She then relates the connection of the language to how the body and the hunt is experienced. "When Dorothy Lee asked a Wintu the word for 'body' she was given a term meaning *the whole person*. The Wintu does not say *my head aches*; he says *I ache head*."[9] Lee also states the Wintu view of reality and the hunt in these words:

> His experience is that of a reality shaped by his perception and conceptualization. Beyond it is the timeless design to which his experience has given temporality. He believes in it, and he taps it through his ritual acts and his magic, seeking luck to reinforce and validate his experiential skills and knowledge, to endow his acts with effectiveness. A hunter must have both skill and luck; but skill is the more limited. *An unskilled hunter who has luck, can still hit a deer by rare chance, but a skilled hunter without luck can never do so*. The myths contain examples of hunters who, having lost their luck, can never kill a deer again. Now knowledge and skill are phrased agentively and experientially; but luck is phrased passively or in terms of non-actualized reality. The hunter who has lost his luck does not say "I cannot kill deer any more," but "Deer don't want to die for me any more."[10]

The overall implication of the linguistic structure for cognition may be summed up as follows:

> I cannot find an adequate English term to apply to a habit of thought which is so alien to our culture. *We are aggressive toward reality*. We say, *This is bread*; we do not say like the Wintu, *I call this bread*...If he speaks of reality which is not within his own restricting experience, he does not affirm it, he only implies it. If he speaks of his experience, he does not express it as categorically true. Our attitude toward nature is colored by a desire to control and exploit. The Wintu relationship with nature is one of intimacy and mutual courtesy. He kills a deer only when he needs it for his livelihood, and utilizes every part of it, hoofs and marrow and hide and sinew and flesh.

> Waste is abhorrent to him, not because he believes in the intrinsic virtue of thrift, but because the deer had died for him.[11]

Language, Cognition and Religion: The Case of the Hopi Indians

The Hopis have lived in northern Arizona for centuries. Historical accounts of encounter with the Spanish date from the early sixteenth century. They inhabit a high desert area which is very dry and they live on maize, whose cultivation is made possible by regular summer rainfall.

The anthropologist who brought the special features of the Hopi language to the attention of the world was Benjamin Lee Whorf.[12] In what has been called "his landmark essay,"[13] entitled "An American Indian Model of the Universe," he wrote:

> Hopi language is seen to contain no words, grammatical forms, constructions or expressions that refer directly to what we call 'time,' or the past, present, or future, or to enduring or lasting, or to motion as kinematic rather than dynamic...Hence, the Hopi language contained no reference to 'time,' either explicit or implicit.[14]

He articulated the implication of this linguistic uniqueness in a broader multicultural context as follows: "Just as it is possible to have any number of geometries other than the Euclidean which give an equally perfect account of space configurations, so it is possible to have descriptions of the universe, all equally valid, that do not contain our familiar contrasts of time and space."[15]

The experience of the Hopis highlights the double role of language in the understanding of primal religion – and by extension all language: (1) language shapes how a people perceive the world, including their world of religion; and (2) our language shapes how we perceive their religion!

As an example of how language shapes (religious) experience, one may consider the fact that "in the Hopi language there are no verbs corresponding to the English 'come' or 'go' that mean simple and abstract motion of a purely kinematic way of thinking. Hopi terms for 'to come' tend to mean 'eventuates to here,' 'eventuate from it,' 'arrived,' etc. 'Thus,' Whorf concludes, 'this nearer edge of the subjective cuts across and includes a part of our [Western] present time, viz. the moment of inception, but most of our present belongs in the scheme to the objective realm and so is indistinguishable from our past.'"[16] Jamake Highwater goes on to say:

> To the Hopi there is no temporal future; there is nothing in the subjective state corresponding to the sequences and successions conjoined with

> distances and changing physical configurations that the West finds in the objective world. The Hopi conceive time and motion in the objective realm in a purely operational sense – constantly turning the Western notions about *things* into propositions about *events*.[17]

As an example of how we can (mis)understand someone's religious worldview shaped by their language we may consider the statement that "The Hopi *Stories of Origin* tell of the journey of the Hopi's predecessors through lower worlds to gain residence on the present earth surface."[18] However, as the Hopis do not share our concept of time, the 'prior' to them is not temporal but ontological. As Jamake Highwater explains:

> The Hopi realize and even express in their grammar that the things recalled in myths do not have the same kind of reality as things of the present day, the things of practical concern. The dim past of myths is thus reached subjectively through the vertical axis of reality. Hence that *realm is placed below the present surface of the earth, though this does not mean that the land of the Hopi origin myths is a hole or cavern as we tend to understand it*.[19]

There are a few other considerations which the discussion of the Hopi language and religious reality brings to the surface: such as the relationship of tenses→time→religious concepts, a point which also emerged in the discussion of African primal religions. The fact, for instance, that the Hopis do not have tenses does not necessarily mean that they have no sense of time, rather that they interpret time differently. Sam Gill asks the question for us:

> But what of the *lack of tense* in the Hopi language? Our review of Hopi temporal planes has shown us that it is not the pastness or presentness that makes an action significant at all, but rather how it is viewed, what is its experiential quality, how it informs the character of the place on which one stands. Clearly the Hopi can distinguish between past, present, and future events as well as can any, but their language reflects that they evaluate temporal experience in different terms.[20]

Jamake Highwater enables us to tease out the point further when he writes: "In Hopi, like most Indian languages, temporal thinking is so drastically different from the ideas of Western time that there are no divisions such as hours, minutes, seconds, etc. – and the only designations of time are related to the experience of night and day, the phases of the moon, and the solstices, etc."[21]

The connection with religious observances can now be established, with the help of the reference to the solstice. "From one Hopi perspective, the sun is perceived as a deity, and it is through ritual that the Hopi interact with the sun as God, an interaction essential to Hopi life. *The solstice rites are performed in order to turn the sun back in its course so that the seasons may*

proceed."[22] In fact it is the "responsibility of the Hopi to perform the *ritual* acts that direct the run along its course."[23]

The temporal peculiarity of the Hopi language may also account for the fact that "an individual's life is not seen as a cycle but as a road ideologically oriented *in space* from west to east."[24] Sam Gill elaborates:

> The road begins with conception, and there are formal moments of passage which mark and effect one's steps along its entire length. Upon physical birth the mother and baby remain in the mother's clan house and away from the sun for twenty days before the baby is born into the community and world. On the morning of the twentieth day the baby is presented to the rising sun and given names by it father's clanswomen. These are but the first steps of the long road leading through life which prepares one for a destiny as a *kachina* (messenger spirit between physical and spiritual domains) or a cloud spirit (spiritual beings of rain, and hence life, to the Hopi people).[25]

Language, Cognition and Religion: The Case of English

One may now turn from the language of the Hopis to the language of Benjamin Lee Whorf, or the language in which he described their language. One would not wish to probe this point too deeply in the context of primal religions but it might be instructive to touch on the subject and to demonstrate how language influences cognition and religion even at the level of vocabulary, leaving the question of language structure aside for the moment.

Among the many words of the language we use there are two, along with many others of course, which we often invoke in the study of religion: knowledge and love. Elaine Pagels has pointed out that "English is unusual within its language group in having only one verb ('to know') to express different kinds of knowing. Modern European languages use one word to characterize intellectual knowledge and another for the knowledge of personal relationships: French, to example, distinguishes between *savoir* and *connaitre*, Spanish between *saber* and *conocer*, Italian between *sapere* and *conoscere*, German between *wissen* and *kennen*."[26]

One can now see why the famous treatise, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, bears the title it does, when it really deals with the knowledge of God. This linguistic inversion tells us how an antinomy had to be set up to convey a religious idea, which may not be necessary in other languages. But right here lie the seeds which could lead to the demarcation of two spheres, and in opposition as well, in religious terms, because of the way the language has with words!

A similar problem is posed by the word "love." Even as it is, the word love in any language perhaps would cause difficulties on account of the semantic range it covers. Edward Conze, the celebrated Buddhist scholar, hardly ever misses an opportunity to make this point: "...the word 'love' is one of the most unsatisfactory and ambiguous terms one could possibly use";[27] "now the word *love* is extremely ambiguous, and harbours a great multiplicity of meanings."[28] Further, its usage in English embraces the meaning of both *passion* and *compassion*, and we have terms of endearment which are supposed to signify love which have nothing to do with it. Every day we send out numerous letters to people as dear so-and-so towards whom we may harbour any sentiment but. This pervasive linguistic need to display love has its consequence in religion in which love is proclaimed as the highest virtue but a proclamation from which the distinction between *eros*, *agape* and *filia* have been removed. I leave the rest to your imagination.

Language, Cognition and Religion: Some Conclusions

Primal religions are distinguished by a multiplicity of languages. Moreover, primal religions by definition are preliterate. They possess a language, but often without a script. The appreciation of both these aspects of primal cultures and religions could make its own contribution to the philosophy of religion.

(1) The first fact, namely, the multiplicity and diversity of languages associated with primal religions can lead, and has led, to an appreciation of the fact that language is not merely expressive but may also be constitutive of religious experience. The danger to avoid here is that of linguistic determinism. Thus the identification of the Hopi language became "linked with a hypothesis of linguistic determination proposed by Whorf and Edward Sapir, which proclaimed that language determines one's view of reality – which suggested that the Hopi must experience time in ways strangely different from us."[29]

Sam Gill points out how some took "this view to the full extent of supposing that the Hopi do not perceive time at all but live in a mystical timeless world."[30] Sam Gill, by reviewing Hopi culture in the five domains of (1) ecology and occupation; (2) social structure; (3) history; (4) stories of origin and (5) ritual, was able to present a very different picture.[31]

(2) Nonliterate cultures will also manifest this cultural difference in religious terms. "For example, time orientations that are associated with an ever-accumulating record of the past held more or less changeless by a permanent record are difficult without writing and do not exist in nonliterate cultures. History is not absent in nonliterate cultures, but since it is an oral tradition it tends to merge with legend and tale. The highly symbolic forms

of stories of origin and ritual tend to be central in nonliterate cultures because they help to facilitate the retention in the memory of living people the whole of the knowledge and experience in forms that digest existential experience and expel the irrelevant."[32]

The danger is to identify nonliteracy with the absence of intellectual activity and assume its paucity in the religions life of the people, overlooking the fact it might be expressed through other modes which may not involve writing, such as art or oral literature.

CHAPTER X

THE PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

The Distinctive Nature of Religious Language

Religious language is distinct. What could such a statement mean, for apparently the same language, whether used in a religious or nonreligious linguistic context, remains the same; what could be distinctive about it is only the possibility that it is used in a distinctive way. The expression could have two other meanings. (1) That the followers of a religion really use two languages, as when a religious Islamic community might use only Arabic in a religious context and its own 'native' language in other contexts. (2) It could also mean that the religious community possesses a sacred text, which is in the same language as its language of secular discourse, like Hebrew in modern Israel. 'Religious language is distinct' would then mean that scriptural Hebrew is viewed as distinct from ordinary Hebrew.

It is important to begin by raising these issues as Western discussions of religious language generally presuppose the existence of literature, if not scriptures, as part and parcel of a religious tradition to such an extent that

> To speak of the philosophy of cultures that had no literature may seem inappropriate, but there are parallels for this. The ancient Hindus compiled the hymns of the Vedas and the dialogues of the Upanishads, which are imbued with philosophy and are often claimed as the oldest 'scriptures' but these were not written down for many centuries, until well into the Christian era. The ancient teachings were passed down by the priests of the Brahmin caste, in feats of memorization which were unique. Ancient African ideas were not transmitted so rigidly but there are myths which go back to time immemorial, proverbs which enshrine ancient wisdom, songs and rituals, and

> modern attitudes that reflect traditions of the past was well as thought about the present.[1]

This passage is helpful in identifying two possibilities: (1) that a tradition may possess a sacred text (which is usually called scripture, because it is written down) *not* committed to writing and yet transmitted faithfully over generations and (2) that it may possess forms of oral literature (another oxymoron like oral scripture) in relation to which the same problems of religious language might arise, as in the case of religious traditions which do possess a scripture. For the problems of religious language arise not because of the form but the content of religious language. For when the words of daily usage are applied in a religious context, and especially in God-talk,

> It is obvious that many, perhaps all, of the terms that are applied in religious discourse to God are being used in special ways, differing from their use in ordinary mundane contexts. For example, when it is said that "Great is the Lord." it is not meant that God occupies a large volume of space; when it is said the "the Lord spake unto Joshua," it is not meant the God has a physical body with speech organs which set in motion sound waves which impinged upon Joshua's eardrums. When it is said the God is good, it is not meant that there are moral values independent of the divine nature, in relation to which God can be judged to be good; not does it mean (as it commonly does of human beings) that God is subject to temptations but succeeds in overcoming them. There has clearly been a long shift of meaning between the familiar use of these words and their theological employment.[2]

Religious language is thus distinct, and this fact has given rise to four main issues in the philosophy of religion, among others; the first "concerns the special sense that descriptive terms bear when they are applied to God." The second is "concerned with the basic function of religious language,"[3] namely, "do religious statements that have the form of factual assertions (for example, 'God loves mankind') refer to a special kind of fact – religious as distinguished from scientific fact – or do they fulfill a different function altogether?"[4] The third issue, which would arise if religious language is not performing in non-literature cultures the role assigned to it in literate cultures, would naturally concern the following point: do other modes of expression perform the function of religious language? Thus "it can be claimed that African art provides a kind of scripture of African religion, for it is its expression from within."[5] The fourth issue concerns the general statement that "language determines one's view of reality."[6] If this statement is in any sense true then it raises the allied question: does language also determine, or at least significantly affect, one's view of religious reality.

Although religious language is distinct, it is worth noting initially that "in all those cases in which a word occurs both in secular and in theological contexts, its secular meaning is primary, in the sense that it developed first

and has accordingly determined the definition of the word." This then naturally means that the meaning "such a term bears when it is applied to God is an adaptation of its secular use." This carries with it the possibility that such an adaptation may prove problematical. Even in secular usage such applications can become problematical, unless the context is clear. One might refer to Mr. Smith as a minister, without it being immediately obvious that Mr. Smith is a member of the cabinet or the minister of a parish, or indeed both! The same is true of secular words used in a religious context, only more so. "To take a single example, love (whether *eros* or *agape*) is expressed in behaviour in the speaking of words of love, and in a range of emotions from lovemaking to the various forms of practical and sacrificial caring. But God is said to be 'without body, parts, or passions.' God has then, it would seem, no local existence or bodily presence through which to express love. But what is disembodied love, and how can we ever know that it exists? Parallel questions arise in relation to other divine attributes."[7]

Aquinas' Doctrine of Analogy

The doctrine of analogy can be explained by drawing two distinctions and then extending them in an upward and downward direction. The two distinctions involve distinguishing the word *analogical* from the words *univocal* and *equivocal*. To use a word univocally is to use it in exactly the same manner. When one says that Robert and John are males, or June and Julie are females, then the words have been used univocally. On the other hand, we could describe a situation as follows: "he was hit by a bat." The statement is equivocal, for the nature of the accident is not clear. It could "refer both to a flying animal and to a thing used in baseball."[8] If, however, one employed the expression: "God is good" it would be neither univocal because God cannot be good exactly in the sense we use it to refer to human beings, nor can it be equivocal or mean two entirely different things unrelatable to each other. Hence, according to "Aquinas, then, 'good' is applied to creator and creature neither univocally nor equivocally by *analogically*."[9]

Such analogy can have both a downward and an upward application. This is easily explained by bringing a human being in relation to 'God' and its transposed form 'dog' who, an American student's graffiti reminds us, is still a man's best friend even when spelled backward.[10] When it is said 'God loves us' we are taking our human concept of love as the starting point and launching it on a semantic trajectory of whose direction we may be certain, but not of its nature or extent. For God may have ways of loving human beings of which human beings have no idea. On the other hand, when it is

said, "my dog loves me," then the analogy is being applied in a downward direction, for the dog cannot love another human being as human beings can. In this case one is narrowing the cone of meaning to whatever elements in the love of dog for the master are comparable to love as human beings understand it, such as 'faithfulness' for instance.

The significance of analogy has been explained felicitously by Baron von Hügel (1852-1925) as follows:

> The source and object of religion, if religion be true and its object be real, *cannot* indeed, *by any possibility, be as clear to me even as I am to my dog*. For the cases we have considered deal with realities inferior to our own reality (material objects, or animals), or with realities level to our own reality (fellow human beings), or with realities no higher above ourselves than are we, finite human beings, to our very finite dogs. Whereas, in the case of religion – if religion be right – we apprehend and affirm realities indefinitely superior in quality and amount of reality to ourselves, and which, nevertheless (or rather, just because of this), anticipate, penetrate, and sustain us with a quite unpicturable intimacy. The obscurity of my life to my dog, must thus be greatly exceeded by the obscurity of the life of God to me. Indeed the obscurity of plant life – so obscure for my mind, because so indefinitely inferior and poorer than is my human life – must be greatly exceeded by the dimness, for my human life, of God – of His reality and life, so different and superior, so unspeakably more rich and alive, that is, or ever can be, my own life and reality.[11]

Tillich's View of Religious Statements as Symbolic

Paul Tillich's views can also be explained with the help of a distinction and then by moving the thesis in two directions. The crucial distinction involved here is between 'sign' and 'symbol.' A sign, according to him, is "an arbitrary convention – as for instance, when the red light at the corner signifies that drivers are ordered to halt." [12] By contrast, a symbol "participates in what it points to."[13] The classic example here is that of a flag "which participates in the power and dignity of the nation it represents."[14] According to Tillich, religious language is symbolic in terms of this distinction:

> There can be no doubt that any concrete assertion about God must be symbolic, for a concrete assertion is one which uses a segment of finite experience in order to say something about him. It transcends the content of this segment, although it also includes it. The segment of finite reality which becomes the vehicle of a concrete assertion about God is affirmed and negated at the same time. It becomes a symbol, for a symbolic expression is

> one whose proper meaning is negated by that to which it points. And yet it also is affirmed by it, and this affirmation gives the symbolic expression an adequate basis for pointing beyond itself.[15]

This point his view can be developed in a theistic or a naturalistic direction.[16]

The primal perspective has the effect of turning Tillich's thesis regarding religious language on its head, for in the primal religious tradition *symbols serve as religious statements*. The point is well-illustrated by the example of the Achilpa, and Arunta tribe in Australia, and the experiences of Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen who lived among them.[17] The pertinent details may be summarized as follows:

> The Achilpa are an Arunta tribe of gatherers and small game hunters in Australia. According to their stories, their world was created by a deity named Numbakula. He not only made the world; he also created the ancestors of the people and lived with them for a time in order to establish their way of life. When he had finished his work of creation, Numbakula made a pole from the trunk of a gum tree. Upon anointing the pole with blood, he climbed it and disappeared into the sky.
>
> The Achilpa kept the pole as their most sacred possession and it stood at the center of their lives, reminding them of the ways that had been established for them by Numbakula. They used the pole to direct their nomadic movements. When they were ready to move to a new location, they consulted the pole and moved in the direction in which it leaned. It was always taken with them and carefully protected.
>
> Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, who lived among the Achilpa for a time, described what happened once when the sacred pole was broken. The people were very disturbed and confused and seemed to wander about aimlessly for a time until finally they all lay down on the ground to await the death they thought was to come.[18]

What is going on here? If God were to give directions to the Hebrews and then fall silent, they would be confused. If he chose to do so through Moses, and then he too fell silent, they would be confused too. Such use of religious language would be symbolic according to Tillich. In this case, however, the 'symbol' itself was Moses, as it were. As Sam Gill explains:

> Certainly we can see this in the Australian example, as simple as it is. The Achilpa, by carrying their sacred pole with them and by erecting it wherever they camp, are asserting the meaning and order revealed by the deity Numbakula upon the temporary space in which they live. It is the point from which all their activities gain orientation. It signals the basic distinctions which give them identity and by which they cohere. It is the channel through

> which they may continue to communicate with Numbakula, who lives in the sky. And through it Numbakula can communicate with the people, telling them, among other things, which way to travel. Even though it moves with them, the pole is the fixed point, the point of origin, the point giving meaning about which their lives are ordered. Seen in this way it is little wonder the Achilpa were so upset and even submitted to death when their sacred pole was broken. Symbolically they were cut off from their deity, from their heritage, from the order and orientation of their world. Without this center, they were symbolically in a state of chaos. Their aimless wandering and submission to death show the degree to which they found the meaning of their lives and livelihoods linked to their sacred pole. It was no ornament, no vacuous symbol, so superstition. It was the center and source of meaning in their whole way of life.[19]

Primal religions also provide illustrations of a more straightforward application of Tillich's thesis, if we decide to choose to substitute the word 'symbolic' by 'paradigmatic.' The following account is instructive in this respect:

> The primal myth of most cosmologies the world over is that of creation. Sometimes God is thought to have created from nothing, and at other times from an already existent primal matter. The Dogon of Mali and Upper Volta say that the first invention of God (Amma) was to create the sun and moon, the former white and surrounded by eight red copper rings, and the latter with rings of white copper. The earth was made from a lump of clay which was thrown into space, where it spread out flat like a body lying face upwards. In his loneliness Amma sought union with the earth, but had first to excise its clitoris which was like a termite hill. This myth is used to justify female excision and attempts at suppressing this practice are resisted. The trouble over the divine-earth union resulted first in the birth of a jackal who caused mischief later. Further union produced twins called Nummo, half-human and half-snake, green and red, and embodying the principle of movement and energy in water. Further beings were made which were bi-sexual, and it is believed that all men and women are bi-sexual, before circumcision and excision.[20]

Tillich's statements about religious statements as symbolic apply in an engaging way to the world of 'magic,' if we assimilate that term in religion,[21] as revealed by the experience of John V. Taylor. It is described in *The Primal Vision* as follows:

> There is an excellent illustration of this bringing together of the two worlds in a symbolism that sounds to Western ears like double-talk in Monica Wilson's richly personal study, *Communal Rituals of the Nyakyusa*. The incident was reported by her husband Kasitile, a ritual functionary and rain-maker of the aristocratic tribe and had invaded the land generations before,

was frightened about recurrent sickness of various kinds from which he had been suffering. He had consulted several diviners and suspected in turn a number of different past acts of his by which the living or the dead had been offended. For a time he had moved from the hill country to the plain in the hope of escaping whatever anger was pursuing him. Finally he had been deeply impressed by the diagnosis of another diviner who had advised him to propitiate his dead father's shade and to invite to the ceremony three village headmen, priests of the local grove, who were commoners; that is to say they were members of the aboriginal tribe which, subdued by military power, looked to witchcraft to redress the balance. So on a fixed day he called the commoner priests together with his senior kinsman and another of the chief's lineage, and a bull was ritually killed. Drinking and discussion continued all day in an attempt, apparently, to discover what had angered his father's shade. The crucial moments in the conversation are recorded, together with the interpretation of their significance, which Kasitile later explained to Godfrey Wilson, in brackets.

At one point Kasitile told them of the prayer he had offered at his father's shrine the previous evening, in the course of which he has said: 'Indeed, I, your wife, have done wrong. I come to enter. I am a woman.' ('So I admitted to Kissogota, the commoner priest, saying "Indeed I have done wrong. I humble myself as your wife."' This was Kasitile's public apology for an offence of long standing. It was now up to the commoner priests on their side to confess the hatred they had nourished against him.)

At a later stage Kasitile and Kissogota began mutual compliments and self-depreciation, Kissogota said: 'You are impressive, you, you are impressive, we are only cannibals.' (This meant: 'You chiefs kill cattle for us, that is your impressiveness. Do we kill cattle? No. We eat *men*; we are witches.')

Kasitile replied: 'You are impressive yourself; if I look at you my body changes.' (This meant: 'You are impressive for you are witches. It is you who brought the chilling breath on me and said I had done wrong. If I walk about among you my body shrinks, it fears.')

After a long time Kissogota made as if to leave the company. At this one of Kasitile's companions, Mwamakunda, burst out: 'Why do you shut up words in the heart? Do you wish that Kasitile should become a fool?' (Kasitile said later of this: 'That is very important. Mwamakunda is my man, he stands by me, he eats meat with me, he compelled them to speak out, because if they do not admit that it is they then the ritual fails.')

Kissogota replied: 'We have not yet done so, Mwamakunda, we have not yet. Do you think we are angry? Who went to fetch Kasitile back from the plain? It was we, we went ourselves.'

> The second commoner priest added, fiercely: 'We have power, we have. If we please we can give the chief worms.'
>
> Kasitile and his kinsman listened without comment. It was the crucial moment to which all had led them. It was in fact the admission for which they had been made to wait so long. Kasitile later explained: 'Did not Kissogota boast? He said, "Indeed we came, it is us, it is us." He boasted very much, he said: "We have power. If we like we can give him worms." Did I not tell you that I had worms when I came up from the plain? Where did they come from? They came from these priests, they called the shades to their aid.'
>
> The whole process had been a ritual of reconciliation, dependent upon 'speaking out' the offence, the resulting malevolence and the fear. But it was expressed obliquely, because it had been experienced as myth, that myth which 'is a reality immeasurably greater than concept' and 'brings two worlds together symbolically.'
>
> 'It must never be forgotten' warns Dr. Parrinder, 'that we have to do with a spiritual religion, however material it may appear at first sight.' We shall need to remember that if we seriously intend to understand this African vision of reality, for we shall find ourselves entering a world of strange perspectives and relationships, marked with symbols that may often dismay or repel. It will be necessary to remind ourselves, for example, that if we still slaughtered our own beasts for food we would not find the details of blood sacrifice too shocking to admit of a spiritual interpretation. It is we, perhaps, who have turned over so many of the more earthy features of human life to discreetly concealed specialists, who are the unnatural ones rather than they.[22]

Incarnation and the Problem of Meaning

The idea of incarnation in the context of the problem of meaning can also be explained by making a crucial distinction and extending it in a twofold direction. The distinction is to be drawn between the "metaphysical attributes of God (aseity, eternity, infinity, etc.) and God's moral attributes (goodness, love, wisdom, etc.)"[23] The Christian doctrine of incarnation "involves the claim that the moral (but not the metaphysical) attributes of God have been embodied, so far as it is possible, in a finite human life, namely that of Jesus. This claim makes it possible to point to the person of Christ as showing what is meant by assertions such as 'God is good' and 'God loves his human creatures.'"[24] John Hick suggests that this offers at least "a partial solution to the problem of theological meaning."[25]

The example of Incarnation sheds interesting and perhaps unexpected light, when the question of religious language is engaged from the perspective of primal religions. The point becomes more transparent when presented along with the Christian claim that the Incarnation was "fully God and fully man" at the same time – rejecting both monophysitism and adoptionism as alternatives. The remarks of Mircea Eliade apropos this point are too clear to require comment but do need to be cited in extenso:

> This coming-together of sacred and profane really produces a kind of breakthrough of the various levels of existence. It is implied in every hierophany whatever, for every hierophany shows, makes manifest, the coexistence of contradictory essences: sacred and profane, spirit and matter, eternal and non-eternal, and so on. That the dialectic of hierophanies, of the manifestation of the sacred in material things, should be an object for even such complex theology as that of the Middle Ages serves to prove that it remains *the* cardinal problem of any religion. One might even say that all hierophanies are simply prefigurations of the miracle of the *Incarnation*, that every hierophany is an abortive attempt to reveal the mystery of the coming together of God and man. Ockham, for instance, even went so far as to write: "Est articulus fidei quod Deus assumpsit naturam humanam. Non includit contraditionem, Deus assumere naturam assinam. Pari ratione potest assumere lapidum aut lignum." It does not, therefore, seem absurd in the least to study the nature of primitive hierophanies in the light of Christian theology: God is free to manifest himself under any form – even that of stone or wood. Leaving out for a moment the word "God," this may be translated: the sacred may be seen under any sort of form, even the most alien. In fact, what is paradoxical, what is beyond our understanding, is not that the sacred can be manifested in stones or in trees, but that it can be manifested at all, that it can thus become limited and relative.[26]

The move from a consideration of religious language as cognitive to non-cognitive represents a significant shift in the way we approach the problem of religious knowledge. For

> When we assert what we take to be a fact (or deny what is alleged to be a fact), we are using language cognitively. "The population of China is one billion," "This is a hot summer," "Two plus two equal four," "He is not here" are cognitive utterances. Indeed, we can define a cognitive (or informative or indicative) sentence as one that is either true of false.[27]

However, such use does not exhaust the possible functions of language and hence potentially of religious language.

> There are, however, other types of utterance which are neither true nor false because they fulfill a different function from that of endeavoring to describe facts. We do not ask of a swearword, or a command, or the baptismal

> formula whether it is true. The function of the swearword is to vent one's feelings; of the command, to direct someone's actions; of "I baptize thee...," to perform a baptism. The question arises whether theological sentences such as "God loves humankind" are cognitive or noncognitive. This query at once divides into two: (1) Are such sentences intended by their users to be construed cognitively? (2) Is their logical character such that they can, in fact, regardless of intention, be either true or false?[28]

This move from a cognitive to a non-cognitive mode of trying to understand religious language must be made with some caution. It is then easy to assume, for instance, on the analogy of art, that we have moved into a different domain, for not only is science, with its cognitive bent, different from art, so are the arts among themselves, given their non-cognitive bent. Painters do not sing their poems nor do sculptors design a landscape. However, although the distinctions may be identifiable from the point of view of the cognitive and non-cognitive understandings of religious language, the partitions can be porous.

Let us, for example, examine the question of intentionality. It could well be that although the intentionality is noncognitive, the actuality could be cognitive. It could be true, for instance, regardless of intention as noted earlier. The point could be elaborated with the help of the following comment from Erich Fromm:

> Freud himself states that the fact that an idea satisfies a wish does not mean *necessarily* that the idea is false. Since psychoanalysts have sometimes made this erroneous conclusion, I want to stress this remark of Freud's. Indeed, there are many true ideas as well as false ones which man has arrived at because he wishes the idea to be true. Most great discoveries are born out of interest in finding something to be true. While the presence of such interest *may make the observer suspicious*, it can never disprove the validity of a concept or statement. The criterion of validity does not lie in the psychological analysis of motivation but in the examination of evidence for or against a hypothesis within the logical framework of the hypothesis.[29]

In the context of primal religions, however, they can be cognitive while being non-cognitive in another sense – namely, predictive or proleptic. In cases of magic, for instance, the intention is cognitive although the effect may not be so.

Similarly, it would be misleading to think that just because one is investigating the non-cognitive dimension of religious language, one has been released from all connection with the cognitive. The experience of the Swiss artist with the Sioux in 1852 is instructive in this regard.

> "While I was sketching one afternoon," wrote Kurz, "a Sioux visited me. To my surprise he brought along two interesting drawings of his own. While I worked he glanced over my shoulder and nodded rather sympathetically. It

> turned out that he was not at all satisfied with my drawings. He explained to me that he could do better."
>
> With considerable amusement, Kurz provided drawing paper and ink. The Indian began at once to make drawings. After producing a number of very handsome figures, the Sioux drew a man on horseback. Though the animal was depicted from the side, the Indian artist had drawn both of the man's legs on the side of the horse which was in view.
>
> "No...no," Kurz exclaimed, hoping to correct the error at once. "You must draw only one leg because, you see, the body of the horse conceals the other leg."
>
> Again the Sioux nodded sympathetically at the befuddled Kurz. To strengthen his argument, the Swiss artist quickly sketched a profile view of a man on a horse. The Indian gazed at it and then explained politely that Kurz's representation of a rider with only one leg was "not at all satisfactory."
>
> "But this is the way it *must* be drawn," Kurz insisted. "Only one leg should be visible!"
>
> "Ah," the Sioux said softly, "but you see, a man has *two* legs."
>
> To the Indian the fact that one limb is concealed by the horse's body is not the point. The rule that art must imitate appearances is arbitrary and represents just one idea of reality – though is happens to be the pervasive reality of the dominant culture. Indians are interested in something more essential.[30]

Religious Language as Non-Cognitive: J.H. Randall's (Jr.) View

J.H. Randall expressed his position on the noncognitive nature of religious language succinctly as follows:

> What is important to recognize [says Randall] is that religious symbols belong with social and artistic symbols, in the group of symbols that are both *nonrepresentative* and *noncognitive*. Such noncognitive symbols can be said to symbolize *not some external thing* that can be indicated apart from their operation, but *rather what they themselves do*, their peculiar functions.[31]

According to him "religious symbols have a *fourfold function*. *First*, they arouse the emotions and stir people to actions; they may thereby strengthen people's practical commitment to what they believe to be right. *Second*, they stimulate cooperative action and thus bind a community together through a common response to its symbols. *Third*, they are able to communicate

qualities of experience that cannot be expressed by the literal use of language. *Fourth*, they both evoke and serve to foster and clarify our human experience of an aspect of the world that can be called the 'order of splendor' or the Divine."[32]

The theme of the comparability of *social* and *artistic* symbols to religious symbols is explained by him at some length as follows:

> The work of the painter, the musician, the poet, teaches us how to use our eyes, our ears, our minds, and our feelings with greater power and skill...It shows us how to discern unsuspected qualities in the world encountered, latent powers and possibilities there resident. Still more, it makes us see the new qualities with which the world, in cooperation with the spirit of man, can clothe itself...Is it otherwise with the prophet and the saint? They too can do something to us, they too can effect changes in us and in our world...They teach us how to see what man's life in the world is, and what it might be. They teach us how to discern what human nature can make out ot its natural conditions and materials...They make us receptive to qualities of the world encountered; and they open our hearts to the new qualities with which that world, in cooperation with the spirit of man, can clothe itself. They enable us to see and feel the religious dimension of our world better, the "order of splendor," and of man's experience in and with it. They teach us how to find the Divine; they show us visions of God.[33]

This position can be easily endorsed from a primal philosophical perspective, but not too easily. The first difficulty arises from the fact that Randall implicitly accepts the division of life's activities into different realms such as religion, or music or painting, etc. However, "Among the languages of American Indians there is no word for 'art.' For Indians everything is art...Therefore it needs no name." [34] Jamake Highwater elaborates the point as follows:

> The arts are conceptually discrete – composers do not write "tunes" and artists do not make "pictures," let alone paint houses – they are involved in an infinitely more complex, idealized, and conceptualized act.
>
> It was not always that way. At one time, and as recently as the Renaissance, the major difference between, for example, a folk song and a madrigal was one of refinement rather than concept. The "conceptualizing" of art into something special called "Art" produced a wide separation between commonplace experience and *specialized* forms of expression. *For primal peoples, on the other hand, the relationship between experience and expression has remained so direct and spontaneous that they usually do not possess a word for art. They do, however, possess a concept of living*, which, in Western interpretation, might seem like art.[35]

Thus Randall's view, interpreted more holistically, goes down well with the primal philosophical perspective. It, however, also carries a monitory message: if religious symbols perform functions then they cease to be so if they cease to perform these functions. Although this view seems to be entailed by Randall's position I think it presents an emotional difficulty when it comes to accepting it. John Hick seems to sense this when he comments thus on the last part of the passage from Randall, cited earlier:

> This last statement, however, is enlivened by a philosophic rhetoric which may unintentionally obscure underlying issues. The products of the human imagination are not eternal; they did not exist before men and women themselves existed, and they can persist, even as imagined entities, only as long as men and women exist. The Divine, as defined by Randall, is the temporary mental construction or projection of a recently emerged animal inhabiting one of the satellites of a minor star. God is not, according to this view, the creator and the ultimate ruler of the universe; God is a fleeting ripple of imagination in a tiny corner of space-time.[36]

The primal perspective in this respect is quite forthright. Stanley Diamond remarks:

> Even while creating their myths and ceremonials, their meanings and their insights, primitive people are aware of the reality that they mold. Somewhere Radin tells us that a Maori witness before a native land-court in New Zealand stated in the course of certain testimony:
>
> "The God of whom I speak is dead."
>
> The court replied:
>
> "Gods do not die."
>
> "You are mistaken," continued the witness. "Gods do die, unless there are *tobungas* (priests) to keep them alive."
>
> And in a Maori myth, one God advises another:
>
> "When men no longer believe in us, we are dead."[37]

The claim that "Religion, as we see, is a distinctive human enterprise with a socially indispensable function of its own to perform"[38] comes close to Durkheim's position, a position endorsed by modern primal thinkers; but they speak of the "Native American grasp of the *solidarity of life*"[39] which seems to reach out beyond society, although it certainly includes society. "One vivid expression of the tribal sense of centeredness is perfectly expressed in the Plains Indian ceremonies involving communal smoking, *At the conclusion of the pipe ceremony the participants murmur: 'We are all related.'* The act of smoking is a ritual of communion with *everything* in creation, with every possibility of being – what lies before us and also what

lies beyond our understanding and knowledge. 'We are all related.' In the Native American experience, all things are possible and therefore all things are acceptable. R.D. Laing explains that 'when we destroy a people's experience they become destructive.' It is desirable, then, for our societal structures to be bold and large enough to affirm rather than to deny. *The tribal relationship of Indians is therefore never based upon the tolerance of others, but the experience of the self as part of others. 'We are all related.*'"[40]

But beyond that, as Epes Brown explains:

> All forms under creation were understood to be mysteriously interrelated. Everything was as a relative to every other being or 'thing.' Thus, nothing existed in isolation. The intricately interrelated threads of the spider's web [were thought] to depict the world. The same reference occurs in native American art. This is a profound 'symbol,' when it is understood. The people obviously observed that the threads of the web were drawn out from within the spider's very being. They also recognized that the threads in concentric circles were sticky whereas the threads leading to the center were smooth![41]

Religious Language as Non-Cognitive: R.B. Braithwaite's View

R.B. Braithwaite places the weight on the ethical function of religious language in its non-cognitive aspect, as distinguished by its social dimension identified by Randall. Even when religions preach the same ethic, he would distinguish them on the basis of the "story" they tell to inculcate it. Thus the relation he sees between the stories and the way of life of a religion is

> a psychological and causal one. It is an empirical psychological fact that many people find it easier to resolve upon and to carry through a course of action which is contrary to their natural inclinations if this policy is associated in their minds with certain stories. And in many people the psychological kind is not appreciably weakened by the fact that the story associated with the behavior policy is not believed. Next to the Bible and Prayer Book the most influential work in English Christian religious life has been a book whose stories are frankly recognized as fictitious – Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.[42]

Or as he puts it more philosophically:

> A religious assertion, for me, is the assertion of an intention to carry out a certain behavior policy, subsumable under a sufficiently general principle to be a moral one, together with the implicit or explicit statement, but not the assertion, of certain stories.[43]

From a primal philosophical perspective, this particular view of religious language as non-cognitive in nature will be open to several objections. In the

first place, in Braithwaite's view, the distinction between two religions, say Christianity and Buddhism, lies not so much in their ethics and rituals, it "lies in the different sets of stories (or myths or parables) that are associated in the two religions with adherence to their way of life."[44] However, from a primal perspective these differences among religions are natural and simply not a major problem to have to deal with philosophically. Besides, the various stories may share a common conclusion. Consider the following account:

> Sometimes it appears that the first men and women had no knowledge of the process of procreation. Another Ashanti story says that a man and woman came from heaven with a python. The latter asked them if they had any children and offered to show them how to make the woman conceive. He stood the couple facing each other and sprayed water on their bellies, saying 'kus, kus,' a formula still used in clan rituals. Then he sent them home to lie together and children were born who took the spirit of the river where the python lived as their tutelary spirit. The python is taboo to them, it must not be killed, and must be buried in a white cloth if it is found dead. The phallic symbolism of the snake is clear, as in Genesis.[45]

The common symbolism reduces the distance between the Ashanti and the Genesis story and thus the distance between the two religious traditions, while Braithwaite predicates their distinctiveness on the distinctiveness of the stories. There are also differences among sets of stories but the difference in the policy of living implied by these differences is not always evident. "Many myths then go on to say that having created the world and having lived here in olden days, God retired to the heavens where he is now. The stories are not unlike the Biblical narrative of the Garden of Eden, since man is blamed for the separation of God from men. But in African myth it is God who withdraws, and not man who is expelled, and the parallel is closer to other myths of the Near East which told of a separation of heaven and earth by their children. It is noteworthy that there are similarities between these African stories in widely separated countries."[46]

As a *philosopher of religion* one might read in God's voluntary withdrawal an implicit call that henceforth human beings must rely on their own resources, as distinguished from the case in which the separation is caused by man's sin which must be atoned in some form – but this is perhaps reading more into the stories than might be intended.

Religious Language as Non-Cognitive: D.Z. Phillips' View

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) introduced the idea of language games in linguistic philosophical circles and its application to religious language has

been developed by D.Z. Phillips. The core idea of a language-game seems to be that to the extent a realm of discourse is defined and shaped by rules internal to it, it is impervious to outside criticism. One might say then that "It would, for example, be an authentic piece of traditional Christian discourse to refer to the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, and to their fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, a fall that has made us, along with all their other descendants, guilty before God. According to this Neo-Wittgensteinian theory of religious language, such a way of talking does not clash with the scientific theory that the human race is not descended from a single primal pair, or that the earliest humans did not live in a paradisal state, for science is a different language-game, with its own quite different criteria."[47]

D.Z. Phillips puts it forthrightly: "What [the believer] learns is religious language; a language that he participates in along with other believers. What I am suggesting is that to know how to use this language is to know God" and "To have the idea of God is to know God."[48]

What Phillips means by this can be illustrated by the application of his view to the themes of immortality. The following two extracts from his writings, drawn by John Hick to illustrate his doctrine, are self-explanatory:

> Eternal life is the reality of goodness, that in terms of which human life is to be assessed...Eternity is not an extension of this present life, but a mode of judging it. Eternity is not *more* life, but this life seen under certain moral and religious modes of thought...Questions about the immortality of the soul are seen not to be questions concerning the extent of a man's life, and in particular concerning whether that life can extend beyond the grave, but questions concerning the kind of life a man is living.
>
> * * * * *
>
> This renunciation [of the idea of a life to come] is what the believer means by dying to the self. He ceases to see himself as the centre of his world. Death's lesson for the believer is to force him to recognise what all his natural instincts want to resist, namely, that he has no claims on the way things go. Most of all, he is forced to realise that his own life is not a necessity.[49]

Phillips' views are of considerable interest for a primal philosophy of religion,[50] not so much in themselves, as in the context of the interface between primal culture and European culture, and primal philosophy and Western philosophy. What Phillips has done is to demonstrate that by applying language-game theory to religious discourse, it might be possible to avoid premature collision of opposing points of view; indeed, it might even be possible to accommodate them. Thus Phillips showed how the old adversaries, traditional Christianity and modern science, might curtsey past each other instead of jousting by simply saying that we are each involved in our own language-game. The same rhetorical or actual device could be

utilized by tribal religions in their dealings with world religions, for instance, as when it is said: "It's a class thing, you know..."

This may be a light aside but the theme is important. It is typified by the following incident:

> A Zuni Indian once asked an ethnologist who was meticulously noting each word of a traditional story, "When I tell these stories, do you *see* it, or do you just write it down?"[51]

It is apparent that the informant wants to know, in philosophical language, whose language-game is being played, or more correctly, can the ethnologist, *apart* from playing his own language game, is *also* capable of playing his informant's language game. As Jamake Highwater remarks:

> That question is not nearly as curious as it may seem when taken literally – for it is not a literal question. As Dennis and Barbara Tedlock have perceptively pointed out in their anthology *Teachings from the American Earth*, even in the empirical West there are alternatives to the "single vision" of Newton. William Blake called it "double vision," and by the term, like the Zuni Indian, he implies not a dualism but a vast alternative access to the multiplicities of experience. "May God keep us from single vision and Newton's sleep," Blake wrote in his *Letter to Thomas Butts*, 1802. Plotinus, the Neo-Platonist of A.D. 250, said something similar: "To any vision must be brought an eye adapted to what is to be seen."[52]

He then clarifies the point further as follows

> "Otherness" does not imply a single, alternative option but a *multiverse of possibilities*. When the Zuni asked the ethnologist if he could *see* the story rather than simply transcribe it in hard-and-fast words, he was asking if a white man were capable of *entering* the story and having the story enter him. He wanted to know if an ethnologist, if a white man, could tell the dancer from the dance – because, if he could somehow make such a dubious distinction, then he would surely fail, from the Zuni standpoint, to see anything at all.[53]

CHAPTER XI

THE PROBLEM OF VERIFICATION

The Question of Verifiability

The two previous chapters were devoted to the examination of the nature of religious language, both in general and as it applied specifically to the case of primal religions. In these two chapters the claims that religious language is cognitive were explored first. This was followed by an exploration of views according to which the nature of religious language is essentially noncognitive.

It is now time to revert to a consideration of the traditional claim, that the nature of religious language is cognitive; but in a modern context. This context is provided by the development of logical positivism and allied theories in the field of philosophy. We will now attempt to juxtapose the traditional religious claim regarding the cognitive nature of language, with the tests established in modern analytical philosophy to verify such claims.

Before proceeding further let us revisit both these points to render the exercise more meaningful and fruitful. One may begin by reasserting, with John Hick, the traditional view regarding the cognitive nature of religious language (lest the claim may have been diluted in the course of the subsequent discussion).

> In implicit opposition to all noncognitive accounts of religious language, traditional Christian and Jewish faith has always presumed the factual character of its basic assertions. It is, of course, evident even to the most preliminary reflection that theological statements, having a unique subject matter, are not wholly like any other kind of statement. They constitute a special use of language, which it is the task of the philosophy of religion to

> examine. However, the way in which this language operates within historic Judaism and Christianity is much closer to ordinary factual assertions than to either expressions of aesthetic intuitions or declarations of ethical policies.[1]

The position which emerged in the early years of this century, prior to the movement known as Logical Positivism, maintained that "in order to be accepted as true a proposition need only pass one test, a direct examination as to its truth or falsity."[2] With the rise of Logical Positivism, however, it came to be thought that a prior condition must be fulfilled, before a proposition could even be subjected to such an examination: namely, that the proposition be meaningful, not in the psychological sense of being satisfying but in the logical sense of being *capable* of being cognitively verified as true or false; that is to say, that it be in principle "verifiable, or at least 'probabilifiable,' by reference to human experience. This means, in effect, that its truth or falsity must make some possible experienceable difference. If its truth of falsity makes no difference that could possibly be observed, the proposition is cognitively meaningless; it does not embody a factual assertion."[3]

One might wonder why must a proposition be meaningful before it is verifiable. John Hick provides the following interesting example of a proposition which appears verifiable, until it becomes clear that it is really meaningless.

> Suppose, for example, the startling news is announced one morning that overnight the entire physical universe has instantaneously doubled in size and that the speed of light has doubled. At first, this news seems to point to a momentous scientific discovery. All the items composing the universe, including our own bodies, are now twice as big as they were yesterday. But questions concerning the evidence for this report must be raised. How can anyone know that the universe has doubled in size? What observable difference does it make whether this is so or not; what events or appearances are supposed to reveal it? On further reflection, it becomes clear that there *could not* be any evidence for this particular proposition, for if the entire universe has doubled and the speed of light has doubled with it, our measurements have also doubled and we can never know that any change has taken place. If our measuring rod has expanded with the objects to be measured, it cannot measure their expansion. In order adequately to acknowledge the systematic impossibility of testing such a proposition, it seems best to classify it as (cognitively) meaningless. It first seemed to be a genuinely factual assertion, but under scrutiny it proves to lack the basic characteristic of an assertion, namely, that it must make an experienceable difference whether the facts are alleged or not.[4]

Verifiability of Religious Propositions

According to Robin Horton primal religionists have claimed, on the basis of data available from primal religions in Africa, that "the *variable* features of religious belief should be explained in terms of physiological, psychological and sociological theory, whilst the *invariant* theistic features should be explained in terms of the presence of the supreme being and of human awareness of this presence." Horton, who finds this prescription "rather puzzling," sees it "grounded in two other propositions which are somewhat easier to understand. The *first* is that the variable features of belief represent the veil of error whilst the invariant theistic features represent the core of truth. The second is that erroneous belief is appropriately explained in terms of physiological, psychological and sociological theory, whilst true belief is appropriately explained in terms of the presence of the object and of human awareness of this presence."[5] The first part of his statement will be examined here and the second in a later section. To restate the first part then, the variable features of a religious belief should be explained in terms of physiological, psychological and sociological theory, whilst the invariant theistic features should be explained in terms of the presence of the supreme being and of human awareness of this presence.[6]

Horton further points out that the demonstration of the invariant feature involves a pattern of explanation. "Let me start by reminding the reader that this pattern of explanation depends on three premises: the first asserting the reality of a supreme being with certain basic attributes; the second asserting the gift by this being to all men at all times and places of an awareness of him and a desire to commune with him; and the third asserting the similar gift of a limited but crucial ability to make veridical statements about him."[7]

He goes on to say: "Between them, these three premises offer rich temptations to metaphysical and methodological argument. Once again, however, I shall try to avoid getting sucked down into the quagmire of metaphysics. Millions of pages have been given over, down the years, to arguments both for and against the reality of a supreme being. And I have absolutely no pretension to being able to contribute anything new to this debate. I shall also try to avoid getting drawn into methodological discussions of the propriety of incorporating assumptions about the reality of the supreme being into explanations of religious phenomena."[8] Horton then proposes to consider the "explanatory scheme as constituting a theoretical hypothesis, featuring postulates about unobservables as well as observables, but none the worse for that. To appraise this hypothesis, I shall first set out what seems to be its most obvious deductive implication, and then go on to compare this implication with the realities of the situation."[9] After such an appraisal he arrives at the following conclusion. "The single most obvious

and most important implication is, of course, that the world-views of all peoples at all times and places must feature as their focal object a supreme being with *certain* constant minimal attributes. Now unfortunately, the realities of the situation in no way correspond with this implication."[10] How may this state of affairs be verified?

Question of Verifiability: John Wisdom's View

John Wisdom maintains that the difference between a theist and an atheist may lie not in the verification of facts but in their assessment of or reaction to these facts; in a sense the meaningfulness is no longer factual but judgemental. This comes out clearly in his famous parable which most scholars cite in full.

> Two people return to their long-neglected garden and find among the weeds a few of the old plants surprisingly vigorous. One says to the other "It must be that a gardener has been coming and doing something about these plants." Upon inquiry they find that no neighbor has ever seen anyone at work in their garden. The first man says to the other "He must have worked while people slept." The other says, "No, someone would have heard him and besides, anybody who cared about the plants would have kept down these weeds." The first man says, "Look at the way these are arranged. There is purpose and a feeling for beauty here. I believe that someone comes, someone invisible to mortal eyes. I believe that the more carefully we look the more we shall find confirmation of this." They examine the garden ever so carefully and sometimes they come on new things suggesting the contrary and even that a malicious person has been at work. Besides examining the garden carefully they also study what happens to gardens left without attention. Each learns all the other learns about this and about the garden. Consequently, when after all this, one says "I still believe a gardener comes" while the other says "I don't" their different words now reflect no difference as to what they have found in the garden, no difference as to what they would find in the garden if they looked further and no difference about how fast untended gardens fall into disorder. At this stage, in this context, the gardener hypothesis has ceased to be experimental, the difference between one who accepts and one who rejects it is not now a matter of the one expecting something the other does not expect. What is the difference between them? The one says, "A gardener comes unseen and unheard. He is manifested only in his works with which we are all familiar," the other says "There is no gardener" and with this difference in what they say about the gardener goes a difference in how they feel towards the garden, in spite of the fact that neither expects anything of it which the other does not expect.[11]

The problem persists for "expressions of feelings do not constitute assertions about the world. We would have to speak, instead, of these different feelings being more or less satisfying or valuable: as Santayana said, religions are not true or false but better or worse. According to Wisdom there is no disagreement about the experienceable facts, the settlement of which would determine whether the theist or the atheist is right. In other words, neither of the rival positions is, even in principle, verifiable."[12]

It should be noted, however, that primal religions do provide for verifiability at another level, at the level of "inner-systematic verification"[13] although this involves a shift from the veridical level as such to the cultural:

> This disrespect for mythic genuineness is an essential element of primal mentality, for it forces the initiated to accept the reality that lies behind appearances. Surely this insistence upon the reality of essences (rather than the belief in appearances) is the motive behind the Hopi initiation of their children. When adolescents are initiated into their clans they are permitted for the first time to witness the unmasking of the kachina impersonators. This seemingly brutal experience represents the gateway to a marvelous reality that cannot be shattered by the Western conception of verisimilitude.[14]

Note that no such ritual exposure of Santa Claus forms part of Western Christian culture.

Question of Verifiability: Anthony Flew's View

If, however, one shifted the focus from verifiability to falsifiability then the question would change from: what must not happen to render this fact verifiable, to what must happen to render it falsifiable. And if nothing can render the proposition falsifiable, then it becomes meaningless. This point has been developed famously by Anthony Flew as follows:

> Now it often seems to people who are not religious as if there was no conceivable event or series of events the occurrence of which would be admitted by sophisticated religious people to be a sufficient reason for conceding "There wasn't a God after all" or "God does not really love us then." Someone tells us that God loves us as a father loves his children. We are reassured. But then we see a child dying of inoperable cancer of the throat. His earthly father is driven frantic in his efforts to help, but his Heavenly Father reveals no obvious sign of concern. Some qualification is made – God's love is "not a merely human love" or it is "an inscrutable love," perhaps – and we realize that such sufferings are quite compatible with the truth of the assertion that "God loves us as a father (but, of course...)." We are reassured again. But

> then perhaps we ask: what is this assurance of God's (appropriately qualified) love worth, what is this apparent guarantee really a guarantee against? Just what would have to happen not merely (morally and wrongly) to tempt but also (logically and rightly) to entitle us to say "God does not love us" or even "God does not exist"? I therefore put...the simple central questions, "What would have to occur or to have occurred to constitute for you a disproof of the love of, or of the existence of, God?"[15]

The question posed here is "whether there is any conceivable event which, if it were to occur, would decisively refute theism? Are there any possible developments of our experience with which theism would be incompatible, or is it equally compatible with whatever may happen? Is anything ruled out by belief in God?"[16]

This is the problem which is faced by one of the African stories by an old woman who lost her family and was about to die but recovered like Job, but without his consolation for

> Then came into her heart a desperate resolution to find God and to ask the meaning of it all. Somewhere up there in the sky must be his dwelling. She began to cut down trees, joining them together and so planting a structure that would reach heaven. Finally she gave up in despair, but not her intention of finding God. Somewhere on earth there must be another way to heaven! So she began to travel, going through country after country, always with the thought in her mind: "I shall come to where the earth ends and there I shall find a road to God and I shall ask him: What have I done to thee that thou afflictest me in this manner?" She never found where the earth ends, but though disappointed she did not give up her search, and as she passed through the different countries they asked her, "What have you come for, old woman?" And the answer would be, "I am seeking Leza." "Seeking Leza! For what?" "My brothers, you ask me! Here in the nations is there one who suffers as I have suffered?" And they would ask again, "How have you suffered?" "In this way. I am alone. As you see me, a solitary old woman; that is how I am!" And they answered, "Yes, we see. That is how you are! Bereaved of friends and husband? In what do you differ from others? The Besetting-One sits on the back of every one of us and we cannot shake him off!" She never obtained her desire: she died of a broken heart.[17]

Perhaps she was also reborn still looking for an answer. In that case the answer would be with us, although she was without it.

The Question of Verifiability: John H. Hick's View

John Hick raises an interesting point in relation to verifiability: that a proposition may be verifiable at one time and not at another; that the

whether might well depend on *when*. He therefore introduces the idea of eschatological verification with the following parable:

> Two people are travelling together along a road. One of them believes that it leads to the Celestial City, the other that it leads nowhere; but since this is the only road there is, both must travel it. Neither has been this way before; therefore, neither is able to say what they will find around each corner. During their journey they meet with moments of refreshment and delight, and with moments of hardship and danger. All the time one of them thinks of the journey as a pilgrimage to the Celestial City. She interprets the pleasant parts as encouragements and the obstacles as trials of her purpose and lessons in endurance, prepared by the sovereign of that city and designed to make of her a worthy citizen of the place when at last she arrives. The other, however, believes none of this, and sees their journey as an unavoidable and aimless ramble. Since he has no choice in the matter, he enjoys the good and endures the bad. For him there is no Celestial City to be reached, no all-encompassing purpose ordaining their journey; there is only the road itself and the luck of the road in good weather and in bad.
>
> During the course of the journey, the issue between them is not an experimental one. That is to say, they do not entertain different expectation about the coming details of the road, but only about its ultimate destination. Yet, when they turn the last corner, it will be apparent that one of them has been right all the time and the other wrong. Thus, although the issue between them has not been experimental, it has nevertheless been a real issue. They have not merely felt differently about the road, for one was feeling appropriately and the other inappropriately in relation to the actual state of affairs. Their opposed interpretations of the situation have constituted genuinely rival assertions, whose assertion-status has the peculiar characteristic of being guaranteed retrospectively by a future crux.[18]

Comparison of John Wisdom, Anthony Flew, John H. Hick and Primal Religions

John Wisdom demonstrated that theism was not verifiable; Anthony Flew demonstrated that it was not falsifiable so that religious language could not meet the tests of cognitive function set on language by modern analytic philosophy. John Hick suggests the following five-point modification of this unrelenting stance:

> (1) The verification of a factual assertion is not the same as a logical demonstration of it. The central core of the idea of verification is the removal of grounds for rational doubt. That a proposition, *p*, is verified means that

something happens that makes it clear that *p* is true. A question is settled, so that there is no longer room for reasonable doubt concerning it. The way in which such grounds are excluded varies, of course, with the subject matter, but the common feature in all cases of verification is the ascertaining of truth by the removal of grounds for rational doubt. Whenever such grounds have been removed, we rightly speak of verification having taken place.

(2) Sometimes it is necessary to put oneself in a certain position or to perform some particular operation as a prerequisite of verification. For example, one can only verify "There is a table in the next room" by going into the next room; however, it is to be noted that one is not compelled to do this.

(3) Therefore, although "verifiable" normally means "publicly verifiable" (i.e., capable in principle of being verified by anyone), it does not follow that a given verifiable proposition has in fact been or will in fact ever be verified by everyone. The number of people who verify a particular true proposition depends upon all manner of contingent factors.

(4) It is possible for a proposition to be in principle verifiable if true but not in principle falsifiable if false. Consider, for example, the proposition that "there are three successive sevens in the decimal determination of π." So far as the value of π has been worked out, it does not contain a series of three sevens; but since the operation can proceed *ad infinitum* it will always be true that a triple seven may occur at a point not yet reached in anyone's calculations. Accordingly, the proposition may any day be verified if it is true but can never be falsified if it is false.

(5) The hypothesis of continued conscious existence after bodily death provides another instance of a proposition that is verifiable if true but not falsifiable if false. This hypothesis entails a prediction that one will, after the date of one's bodily death, have conscious experiences, including the experience of remembering that death. This is a prediction that will be verified in one's own experience if it is true but that cannot be falsified if it is false. That is to say, it can be false, but *that* it is false can never be a fact of which anyone has experiential knowledge. This principle does not undermine the meaningfulness of the survival hypothesis, for if its prediction is true, it will be known to be true.[19]

A primal religious perspective opens up the whole issue of what counts for fact or truth. John Hick distinguishes between "factual assertion" and "logical demonstration." But if the idea of God itself is a "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" then we must distinguish between God and the *idea* of God. To Horton's three statements: (1) that the supreme being possesses certain attributes; (2) that an awareness of him should be universal and (3) that it should be possible to combine "factual assertion" and "logical

demonstration" one would want to add that it is important to know what is precisely being asserted.. For instance, if I say that God acting through this rope saved my life, I am neither saying that God always saves lives or that a rope always saves lives. To rope in God like this is to universalize like a missionary religion; to keep each act of saving distinct is to particularize the universal like a primal or tribal religion.

Evidentialism and Foundationalism Revisited

Robin Horton has presented the material from African primal religion in a way which tends to question the position developed above. The reader will notice that there is a connection between evidentialism and foundationalism and John Hick's views on rational belief. Horton has argued that in dealing with African primal religions, a particular position has been *irrationally accepted as foundational*. In order to enter into his argument one needs to back up a step and start with the following statement of Robin Horton, also cited earlier:

> I shall start with the prescription which ordains that the *variable* features of religious belief should be explained in terms of physiological, psychological and sociological theory, whilst the *invariant* theistic features should be explained in terms of the presence of the supreme being and of human awareness of this presence. As we have seen, this prescription, rather puzzling in itself, is grounded in two other propositions which are somewhat easier to understand. The *first* it that the variable features of belief represent the veil of error whilst the invariant theistic features represent the core of truth. The *second* is that erroneous belief is appropriately explained in terms of physiological, psychological and sociological theory, whilst true belief is appropriately explained in terms of the presence of the object and of human awareness of this presence.[20]

Horton goes on the argue that the "second proposition is remarkably lacking in rational support, those who use it tend, if challenged, to say that it is self-evident. And if they go further than this, it is to cite everyday usage."[21] Shades of foundationalism, it would appear. This is confirmed by what he says next: "Now, on the face of things, it does seem that, in the everyday life at least of modern Western culture, this proposition is by and large accepted. What are commonly regarded as veridical beliefs are normally not thought of as calling for any special explanation. And if those who hold them are challenged to provide such an explanation, they are liable to say something very minimal, such as: 'Well, the world is like that and we have the normal human faculties for observing it.' It is only when someone

confessed to unusual beliefs which the community refuses to consider veridical that a more elaborate apparatus of physiological, psychological and sociological theory is brought in to provide an explanation. In this sense, everyday life does appear to provide the basis for a 'paradigm case' argument for the view that there is one pattern of explanation appropriate for valid beliefs and another appropriate for erroneous ones."[22]

He then proceeds to point out by implication how the religious experience diverges from everyday experience.

> The smooth running of everyday life in the modern West is based on two main assumptions: first, that the world around us is furnished with objects of certain kinds that behave in certain predictable ways; and second, that we *share normal perceptual faculties that enable us to be aware of this furniture and arrive at a consensus of veridical belief about it*. So long as the beliefs of those around us call neither of these assumptions into question, everyday life rolls on smoothly and without problems. This is why we don't normally bother to produce explanations of beliefs commonly accepted as veridical, and why, if challenged to do so, we respond with very perfunctory ones. When someone comes up with odd beliefs about the world, however, the situation is radically changed. Such beliefs threaten the consensus on which the smooth running of everyday life is founded, and therefore evoke a much more careful and elaborate explanatory response.[23]

We noticed earlier that this was precisely the point addressed by William Alston when it was argued that God "may well differ from the supposed subject of sense experience, namely the physical world, in ways that naturally and legitimately generate precisely these differences."[24]

The point of special interest in the context of primal religions is that William Alston's presentation accounts for different perceptions of '*the* Divine,'[25] and even nontheistic or atheistic attitudes. The issue of *polytheism*, however, is not discussed in this context. The evidence from primal religions suggests that it must be given the theological or philosophical consideration due to it, in order that the variety of theistic experience might involve not only the various experience of the same God but also allow for the fact that the experience may differ, at least in some cases, because there are different gods.[26] (It is, of course, also possible to have the same experience of different gods).

We revert now, after this digression, to the main theme.

Difficulties and Complications

The point regarding post-mortem existence is not as simple as might appear at first sight. For in itself it will only offer evidence of continued existence

after death and *not* evidence of the existence of God. Therefore "an experience of survival would not necessarily serve to verify theism. It might be taken as just a surprising natural fact. The deceased atheist able to remember life on earth might find that the universe has turned out to be more complex, and perhaps more to be approved of, then he or she had realized. However, the mere fact of survival, with a new body in a new environment, would not by itself demonstrate to such a person the reality of God. *The life to come might turn out to be as religiously ambiguous as this present life*. It might still be quite unclear whether or not there is a God." [27] This consideration is particularly relevant for primal religions, as, for instance, the tribal religions of Africa where often "the ideal afterlife is one in which a man, having achieved high status as head of a large family or lineage, enjoys similar status in the after-life through the continued attention and deference of his living descendants."[28]

Even in the Christian case, which might seem self-evident, there is need for caution, as pointed out by John Hick. He develops the point in three stages. As part of the first stage, he examines the traditional doctrine of the Beatific Vision as found in "Catholic and mystical theology." He remarks that the difficulty here "is to attach any precise meaning to this phrase. If it is to be more than a poetic metaphor, it signifies that embodied beings see the visible figure of the deity. But to speak in this way would be to think of God as an object in space."[29] For taking the second step he relies on "the deeper insights of the Western tradition" to posit a distinct spiritual realm just as we exist now in a physical realm. This is a gain but one is not home yet. One can now think "of an experienced *situation* that points unambiguously to the reality of God. The consciousness of God will still be, formally, a matter of faith in that it will continue to involve an activity of interpretation. But the data to be interpreted, instead of being bafflingly ambiguous, will at all points confirm religious faith. We are thus postulating a situation that contrasts in an important respect with our present situation. Our present experience of this world in some ways seems to support and in other ways to contradict a religious faith. Some events suggest the reality of an unseen and benevolent intelligence, and others suggest that no such intelligence can be at work. Our environment is thus religiously ambiguous. In order for us to be aware of this fact, we must already have some idea, however vague, of what it would be for a world to be not ambiguous but on the contrary wholly evidential of God. Is it possible to draw out this presupposed idea of a religiously unambiguous situation?"[30]

This leads to the third and final stage, which pertains to Christianity's "own built-in eschatological beliefs."[31] John Hick places great emphasis on the idea of Christians being the "children of God" but in keeping with the primal religions I would be more inclined to appeal directly to the presence

of Jesus himself as confirmatory here. In fact the primal religions may have a general problem here if the Supreme Being is without "certain constant minimal attributes"[32] in primal religions in general, but this would be offset by the distinguishing specifics in particular, such as being a Goddess.[33]

Existence, Factuality and Reality

We began by identifying the ultimate reality as perceived in the Judeo-Christian tradition and in the primal religions as God. We then surveyed arguments for and against believing in such an entity. We discussed the issues associated with such belief: the problem of evil, which undermined it and questions of revelation and faith which amplified it. One thread which ran through this whole enterprise was that of the existence of God. We identified various understandings of it; the cognitive as well as the noncognitive but the question is still with us. We may not be closer to an answer but we now have perhaps a better understanding of the question. As John Hick remarks:

> Can we, then, properly ask whether God "exists"? If we do so, what precisely are we asking? Does "exist" have a single meaning, so that one can ask, in the same sense, "Do flying fish exist; does the square root of minus one exist; does the Freudian superego exist; does God exist?" It seems clear that we are asking very different kinds of questions in these different cases. To ask whether flying fish exist is to ask whether a certain form of organic life is to be found in the oceans of the world. On the other hand, to ask whether the square root of minus one exists is not to ask whether there is a certain kind of material object somewhere, but is to pose a question about the conventions of mathematics. To ask whether there superego exists is to ask whether one accepts the Freudian picture of the structure of the psyche; and this is a decision to which a great variety of considerations may be relevant. To ask whether God exists is to ask – what? Not, certainly, whether there is a particular physical object. Is it (as in the mathematical case) to inquire about linguistic conventions? Or is it (as in the psychological case) it inquire about a great mass of varied considerations – perhaps even the character of our experience as a whole? What, in short, does it mean to affirm that God exists?[34]

The question is more easily answered from the perspective of the noncognitive understanding of religious language. In terms of such an understanding the claim that 'God exists' could be understood "as referring obliquely to the speaker's commitments or to the character of the empirical world"[35] as susceptible to a theistic explanation.

The question is more thorny when understood from a cognitive perspective. To put it starkly: "The theist claims that the existence of God is a question of fact rather than merely of definition or of linguistic usage. The theist also uses the term 'real' and claims that God is real or a reality. But what do these words mean in this context? The problem is essentially the same whether one employs 'exist,' 'fact,' or 'real.'"[36]

John Hick proposes that the question could not be answered in terms of a pre-mortem verification, *particularly in a Christian context*; it could be answered only through eschatological verification. As he explains: "A suggestion that coheres with the idea of eschatological verification is that the common core to the concepts of 'existence,' 'fact,' and 'reality' is the idea of 'making a difference.' To say that *x* exists or is real, that it is a fact that there is an *x*, is to claim that the character of the universe differs in some specific way from the character that an *x*-less universe would have. The nature of this difference will naturally depend upon the character of the *x* in question, and the meaning of 'God exists' will be indicated by spelling out the past, present, and future difference which God's existence is alleged to make within human experience."[37]

How does this conclusion fare in the light of the evidence provided by the primal religious tradition?

Primal religions look to religion for both this-worldly and other-worldly ends, the former typically being directed towards the lesser deities.[38] This enables the idea of verification, in some sense, to be extended to life both here and in the hereafter. One could even suggest that while in the world they understand the question of the existence of a divinity *noncognitively* and in the terms of the other world, *cognitively*.

This requires clarification, since on the face of it the lesser deities are addressed cognitively for favours and in fact this worldly "aims provide the measure of the efficacy of the Gods; sometimes even the measure for decisions as to whether to retain their services or dismiss them."[39] However, any success here must by the very nature of things be ambiguous: one will not know whether the success was accidental or liturgical. The devotee may take it in the latter case; however, while that may be a matter of subjective (noncognitive) satisfaction to him or her, it cannot amount to objective verification.

The question of the objective existence of the Supreme Being remains open to question, though in this case also the Being might perform the functions associated with the noncognitive views of religious language. One should not be too quick to say, however, that the Being's existence is open to post-mortem eschatological verification, following John Hick, because, as

Hick himself notes, it is “less difficult to say what would verify the specific claims of such a religion as Christianity” on account of its specific content and more “difficult to say what future experiences would verify theism in general.”[40] It will depend on how specific the particular primal tradition has been in terms of identifying this state.

CHAPTER XII

CONFLICTING TRUTH CLAIMS OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS

Multiple Faiths all Claiming to be True

What precisely is the problem presented by the conflicting truth claims of different religions, as understood in the philosophy of religion?

> The problem can be posed very concretely in this way. If I had been born in India, I would probably be a Hindu; if in Egypt, probably a Muslim; if in Sri Lanka, probably a Buddhist; but I was born in England and am predictably, a Christian. (Of course, a different "I" would have developed in each case.) These different religions seem to say different and incompatible things about the nature of ultimate reality, about the modes of divine activity, and about the nature and destiny of the human race.

These differences among the various religions could be highlighted through a series of interrogations such as the following:

> Is the divine nature personal or nonpersonal? Does deity become incarnate in the world? Are human beings reborn again and again on earth? Is the empirical self the real self, destined for eternal life in fellowship with God, or is it only a temporary and illusory manifestation of an eternal higher self? Is the Bible, or the Qur'an, or the Bhagavad Gita the Word of God? If what Christianity says in answer to such questions is true, must not what Hinduism says be to a large extent false? If what Buddhism says is true, must not what Islam says be largely false?[1]

We know that Hindus and Muslims and Christians and Buddhists have come in conflict. Are we to infer from this that Hinduism, and Islam and

Christianity and Buddhism represent *conflicting* truth claims? This is a question bound to arise from a primal perspective, when the religious conflicts of the world are viewed from its standpoint. For the point which immediately strikes one is the fact that the world of primal religions is much more diverse religiously than that of world religions and yet, paradoxically, is pockmarked by relatively fewer episodes of conflict among them. (This issue, of course, has to be distinguished from that of the conflict between the primal religions ranged on one side and the world religions on the other). Thus the primal "mode of religiosity continues in Africa, Australia, South-East Asia, the Pacific islands, Siberia and among the Indians of North and South America."[2] Yet the stories of religious conflict emanating from these parts of the world rarely involve conflicts among the primal religions themselves, on religious grounds.

The empirical fact of the conflict among the world religions is also said to possess a philosophical basis. Thus it has been argued:

> The skeptical thrust of these questions goes very deep; for it is a short step from the thought that the different religions cannot all be true, although they each claim to be, to the thought that in all probability none of them is true. Thus Hume laid down the principle "that, in matters of religion, whatever is different is contrary; and that it is impossible the religions of ancient Rome, of Turkey, of Siam, and of China should, all of them, be established on any solid foundation." Accordingly, regarding miracles as evidence for the truth of a particular faith, "Every miracle, therefore, pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions (and all of them abound in miracles), as its direct scope is to establish the particular religion to which it is attributed; so has it the same force, though more indirectly, to overthrow every other system." But the same reasoning, any ground for believing a particular religion to be true must operate as a ground for believing every other religion to be false; accordingly, for any particular religion there will always be far more reason for believing it to be false than for believing it to be true. This is the skeptical argument that arises from the conflicting truth claims of the various world faiths.[3]

The primal perspective is very different from that of Hume. The process of thought set in motion by Hume began with scepticism and ends in exponential scepticism; by contrast, Durkheim commences his discussion with an affirmation:

> *In reality, then there are no religions which are false. All are true in their own fashion; all answer, though in different ways, to the given conditions of human existence*. It is undeniably possible to arrange them in a hierarchy. Some can be called superior to others, in the sense that they call into play higher mental functions, that they are richer in ideas and sentiments, that they contain more concepts with fewer sensations and images, and that their

> arrangement is wiser. But howsoever real this greater complexity and this higher ideality may be, they are not sufficient to place the corresponding religions in different classes. *All are religions equally, just as all living beings are equally alive, from the most humble plastids up to man*. So when we turn to primitive religions it is not with the idea of depreciating religion in general, for these religions are no less respectable than the others. They respond to the same needs, they play the same role, they depend upon the same causes; they can also well serve to show the nature of the religious life, and consequently to resolve the problem which we wish to study.[4]

Concept of a Religion

Some modern scholars have laid the blame of conflicting truth-claims among religions at the door of the concept of religion itself. This is essentially the view of Wilfred Cantwell Smith[5], who writes:

> It is a surprisingly modern aberration for anyone to think that Christianity is true or that Islam is – since the Enlightenment, basically, when Europe began to postulate religions as intellectualistic systems, patterns of doctrine, so that they could for the first time be labeled 'Christianity' and 'Buddhism,' and could be called true or false.[6]

Two other conclusions flow from such a position. One is that if religion represents a cultural gestalt then "it is no more appropriate to speak of a religion as being true or false, any more than it is to speak of a civilization as true or false."[7] If we choose to look upon this gestalt as a "vast living organism with its own credal backbone and its institutional skin," then Wilfred Cantwell Smith has painstakingly endeavoured to demonstrate, that in the case of each religion "this development stands in a questionable relationship to the original event or idea."[8] A third conclusion offered by Smith may also be accommodated here: that there has been much more historical interaction among the world religions than is apparent at first sight so that they are separated not by walls but membranes, as it were and this means that the concept of religion when applied to a religion has more fluidity to it than may be apparent.[9]

We shall advert to the question of the meaning of religion later. But from a primal perspective, since life is not compartmentalized the way it is in the modern West, to call religion false would be tantamount to calling a tribe false; to ask of a primal religion whether it is true or not would be like asking if human beings or human society is true or not. Moreover, given the relative insignificance of the 'credal backbone' and the 'institutional skin' in primal religion, Smith's point loses much of its force.[10] Smith's point about

historical interaction, however, stands, but given the porous sense of boundaries in many ways among the primal cultures also become less significant for the matter on hand. In fact the very idea of history may have to be reformulated in the context of primal religion. The religions do not constitute the history of the people with all the historical interaction involved, "Since people are so intimately bound up with their religious life and outlook, their history constitutes the history of *their* religion."[11]

The question of religion itself, however, emerges to the fore in this context. Three terms assume importance now: religion, community and conversion. As John S. Mbiti explains in the context of Africa

> Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is not formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament. Although many African languages do not have a word for religion as such, it nevertheless accompanies the individual from long before his birth to long after his physical death. Through modern change these traditional religions cannot remain intact, but they are by no means extinct. In times of crisis they often come to the surface, or people revert to them in secret.[12]

The role of the community next needs to be taken into account.

> Traditional religions are not primarily for the individual, but for his community of which he is part. Chapters of African religions are written everywhere in the life of the community, and in traditional society there are no irreligious people. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence. To be without one of these corporate elements of life is to be out of the whole picture. Therefore, to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life or society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion.[13]

Next comes the issue of conversion, and its place in the more comprehensive context of African life.

> It is not enough to learn and embrace a faith which is active once a week, either on Sunday or Friday, while the rest of the week is virtually empty. It is not enough to embrace a faith which is confined to a church building or

> mosque, which is locked up six days and opened only once or twice a week. Unless Christianity and Islam fully occupy the whole person as much as, if not more than, traditional religions do, most converts to these faiths will continue to revert to their old beliefs and practices for perhaps six days a week, and certainly in times of emergency and crisis. The whole environment and the whole time must be occupied by religious meaning, so that at any moment and in any place, a person feels secure enough to act in a meaningful and religious consciousness. Since traditional religions occupy the whole person and the whole of his life, conversion to new religions like Christianity and Islam must embrace his language, thought patterns, fears, social relationships, attitudes and philosophical disposition, if that conversion is to make a lasting impact upon the individual and his community.[14]

John S. Mbiti has presented the issue of conversion as total conversion, implying that the primal way of life is a total way of life. As he was writing in the context of the presence of missionary religions, such a presentation is acceptable. But the more revealing question to ask would be: what is the attitude of the primal religions to conversion?

> Traditional religions are not universal: they are tribal or national. Each religion is bound and limited to the people among whom it has evolved. One traditional religion cannot be propagated in another tribal group. This does not rule out the fact that religious ideas may spread from one people to another. But such ideas spread spontaneously, especially through migrations, intermarriage, conquest, or expert knowledge being sought by individuals of one tribal group from another. Traditional religions have no missionaries to propagate them; and one individual does not preach his religion to another.
>
> Similarly, there is no conversion from one traditional religion to another. Each society has its own religious system, and the propagation of such a complete system would involve propagating the entire life of the people concerned. Therefore a person has to be born in a particular society in order to assimilate the religious system of the society to which he belongs. An outsider cannot enter or appreciate fully the religion of another society. Those few Europeans who claim to have been 'converted' to African religions – and I know some who make such fantastic claims! – do not know what they are saying. To pour out libation or observe a few rituals like Africans, does not constitute conversion to traditional religions.[15]

Towards a Possible Solution

John Hick begins with a historical survey of the religious scene, as he presses towards a possible solution. He accords a central place in this survey

to what Karl Jaspers has called the Axial age, and age which saw the development of the major religious traditions of humanity.[16] This shift in the religious life of the people was such as "*religious faith can only attribute to the pressure of the divine reality on the human spirit*,"[17] a reading confirmed by A.C. Bouquet in these words: "It is a commonplace with specialists in the history of religion that somewhere within the region of 800 B.C. there passed over the populations of this planet a stirring of the mind, which, while it left large tracts of humanity comparatively uninfluenced, produced in a number of different spots on the earth's surface prophetic individuals who created a series of new starting points for human living and thinking."[18]

John Hick argues that spectacular though the developments of this period were,[19] they occurred in relative isolation and as a consequence have left a legacy of conflicting truth claims which consists of the following three prominent aspects: (1) the nature of the experience of the divine: here the main divide is between the personal and nonpersonal perceptions of it; (2) the differences in doctrines: philosophical and theological. Thus Islam and Judaism do not believe in Incarnation; Christianity believes in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, but not Judaism; (3) the differences of founders and scriptures. John Hick attaches the utmost importance to this aspect of the differences and writes:

> However, it is the third kind of difference that constitutes the largest difficulty in the way of religious agreement. Each religion has its holy founder or scripture, or both, in which the divine reality has been revealed – the Vedas, the Torah, the Buddha, Christ and the Bible, the Qur'an. Wherever the Holy is revealed, it claims an absolute response of faith and worship, which thus seems incompatible with a like response to any other claimed disclosure of the Holy.

John Hick then proceeds to illustrate this point with the help of the example of Christianity as follows:

> Within Christianity, for example, this absoluteness and exclusiveness of response has been strongly developed in the doctrine that Christ was uniquely divine, the only Son of God, of one substance with the Father, the only mediator between God and man. But this traditional doctrine, formed in an age of substantial ignorance of the wider religious life of humanity, gives rise today to an acute tension. On the one hand, Christianity traditionally teaches that God is the Creator and Lord of all humanity and seeks humanity's final good and salvation; and on the other hand that only by responding in faith to God in Christ can we be saved. This means that infinite love has ordained that human beings can be saved only in a way that in fact excludes the large majority of them; for the greater part of all the human beings who have been born have lived either before Christ or outside the borders of Christendom.[20]

The primal perspective on these issues presents a very different picture. The issue of the personal and the nonpersonal apprehensions of religious reality will be dealt with in the next section, the last two points may be addressed here.

The main point to note here is that the philosophical and theological positions of a religion, if they are not rooted in their founders and scriptures, can hardly be dissociated from them, so that the main point of differences, and contention if you will, comes to rest on the founders and scriptures. However, the primal religions, as it were, pull the rug from under the feet of this point as by and large the *primal religions have no individual founders and no scriptures*. For instance:

> African religions have neither founders nor reformers. They may, however, incorporate national heroes, leaders, rulers and other famous men and women into their body of beliefs and mythology. Some of these figures are elevated to high national positions and may even be regarded as divinities responsible for natural objects or phenomena. These heroes and heroines form an integral part of the religious milieu of their society, whether or not they played a specifically religious role in their time.[21]
>
> …
>
> One of the difficulties in studying African religions and philosophy is that there are no sacred scriptures. Religion in African societies is written not on paper but in people's hearts, minds, oral history, rituals and religious personages like the priests, rainmakers, officiating elders and even kings. Everybody is a religious carrier. Therefore we have to study not only the beliefs concerning God and the spirits, but also the religious journey of the individual from before birth to after physical death; and to study also the persons responsible for formal rituals and ceremonies. What people do is motivated by what they believe, and what they believe springs from what they do and experience. So then, belief and action in African traditional society cannot be separated: they belong to a single whole.[22]

A Philosophical Framework for Religious Pluralism

John Hick relies on a crucial distinction drawn by Immanuel Kant to build a philosophical framework for religious pluralism. This is the distinction between the world as it is *an sich* and as it appears to human consciousness. John Hick, taking his cue from this distinction, develops the point as follows:

> Is it possible to adopt the broad Kantian distinction between the world as it is in itself and the world as it appears to us with our particular cognitive machinery, and apply it to the relation between the Ultimate Reality and our

> different human awarenesses of that Reality? If so we shall think in terms of a single divine noumenon and many diverse divine phenomena. We may form the hypothesis that the Real *an sich* is experienced by human beings in terms of one of two basic religious concepts. One is the concept of God, or of the Real experienced as nonpersonal, which presides over the various nontheistic forms of religion. Each of these basic concepts is, however, made more concrete (in Kantian terminology, schematized) as a range of particular images of God or particular concepts of the Absolute. These images of God are formed within the different religious histories.[23]

It is apparent to the student of primal religion that within it reality is grasped in both these modes. This point was noted earlier but may be explained further. The Navajo artist Carl Goddman, points out: "Some researchers into Navajo religion say that we have no supreme God because he is not named. This is not so. The Supreme Being is not named because he is unknowable. He is simply the Unknown Power. We worship him through his creation for he is everything in his creation. The various forms of creation have some of his spirit within them."[24]

At the same time American Indians use images. "For Indians images are a means of celebrating mystery and not a matter of explaining it." For Kandinsky art was essentially the same thing: "To speak of mystery in terms of mystery. Is that not content? Is that not the conscious or unconscious purpose of the compulsive urge to create?"[25]

CHAPTER XIII

HUMAN DESTINY: IMMORTALITY AND RESURRECTION

The Immortality of the Soul

The distinction between a (material) body and (immaterial) soul is a widely prevalent feature of religious thought the world over, [1] although this distinction finds its first philosophically clear articulation, in the West, in the thought of Plato (428/7-348/7 B.C.). Various suggestions have been offered to explain the origin of this distinction. These include the experience of dream; of seeing one's reflection; memories of the dead or an imaginative response in the face of death.[2] These explanations have been considered overly rationalistic by some scholars.[3] Primal thought in this respect is far more complex, especially when the point is taken into account that in "a Christian context the human soul is thought about and overvalued in relation to the body."[4] A more comprehensive account of the concept of the soul in primal religions would read as follows:

> The essence of the soul is power, to the extent that power, soul, and life become interchangeable categories. But with regard to traditional societies we can really speak neither of the uniqueness of the soul nor of homogenous and always precise concepts. The linguistic equivalents we use remain very approximate. Since the idea of the soul is rarely the object of metaphysical discussion in these societies, it is difficult to really know if what is designated by the aborigines as "spirit of the man," or "spirit in the man," corresponds to separate inherent potentialities of a determined substance. Nevertheless, the fact that primitive man thinks of himself as unlimited with regard to his physical potentialities shows that he examines himself in order to seize his hidden essence, which extends far beyond his body.[5]

As mentioned earlier, it was Plato who "systematically developed the body-mind dichotomy and first attempted to prove the immortality of the soul." Plato developed the body/mind dichotomy on the basis of the different realms they inhabit. The body inhabits the visible, sensible and *changing* world, while the mind is related to a world of unchanging realities, hence the dichotomy. The immortality of the soul was deduced from the proposition that it was impartite and the experience of the world suggested that all composite objects alone were subject to decay. The point is made by Jacques Maritain as follows:

> A spiritual soul cannot be corrupted, since it possesses no matter; it cannot be disintegrated, since it has no substantial parts; it cannot lose its individual unity, since it is self-subsisting, nor its internal energy, since it contains within itself all the sources of its energies. The human soul cannot die. Once it exists, it cannot disappear; it will necessarily exist for ever, endure without end. Thus, philosophic reason, put to work by a great metaphysician like Thomas Aquinas, is able to prove the immortality of the human soul in a demonstrative manner.[6]

The response to these points from a primal perspective could take several forms. To begin with, (1) not all primal religions subscribe to a neat dichotomy between body and soul. According to some, like the Fani of Gabon, no less than seven types of souls encompass both the psychic *and* the spiritual dimensions of personality. Others, such as the Mbua of the Rio Brancho territory in Brazil speak of three souls. Death follows the departure of all of them. (2) In some primal traditions what happens to the body affects the nature of the soul and vice versa[7], so much so that the word dichotomy is too strong a word to describe the relationship. The relation between body and soul could be so close that bleeding can even be "believed to be hemorrhage of the soul."[8]

The idea of the immortality of the soul may be considered next from the primal perspective. It is of vital importance to note here that

> When detached from the body after death, certain souls can disappear, and others can reach various worlds beyond. For example, one soul makes its way to the place where its ancestors live; another is transmitted as a vital force to its descendants, usually to its grandsons. The ghost remains as a double next to the corpse or appears to the living while they sleep.[9]

What then becomes of Plato's vision[10], when viewed through the spectrum of the primal perspective? In this respect the primal "critique" of it is surprisingly modern in substance, though not in the sophistication of its articulation. From the primal perspective it involves an overvaluation of the soul in relation to the body and overgeneralization in relation to the body-mind phenomenon: or in other words, oversimplification through abstraction.[11] Primal religious thought is also modern in the sense that it admits a variety

of psychological states in the garb of souls, while modern psychology dispenses with the souls but hangs on to the states.

According to John Hick "much mid-twentieth-century philosophy has come to see the human being, not as an eternal soul temporarily attached to a mortal body, but as a form of finite, mortal, psychophysical life."[12] He cites with approval J. Pedersen's statement of the Hebraic view in the matter that 'the body is the soul in its outward form,'[13] which is congruent with the primal perspective.

For the sake of completeness as well as fairness, however, it must be added that according to Mircea Eliade the Australian Aborigines distinguished between two souls – the real one which survives the individual and may undergo reincarnation; and the trickster-soul which may "remain in the body of another person after the death of its real owner." Claude Rivière offers an anthropological explanation of this distinction but it is also philosophically hospitable to a Hindu interpretation and not totally recalcitrant to a Platonic interpretation either.

The Recreation of the Psycho-Psychical Person

The issue of the immortality of the soul is one way of addressing the question of survival after death. Another is resurrection and yet another is reincarnation. John Hick has developed two scenarios embodying the last two destinies for someone he has chosen to call John Smith.

John Hick builds the case of reincarnation by making the following supposition:

> Suppose, first, that someone – John Smith – living in the United States were suddenly and inexplicably to disappear before the eyes of his friends, and that at the same moment an exact replica of him were inexplicably to appear in India. The person who appears in India is exactly similar in both physical and mental characteristics to the person who disappeared in America. There is continuity of memory, complete similarity of bodily features including fingerprints, hair and eye coloration, and stomach contents, and also of beliefs, habits, emotions, and mental dispositions. Further, the "John Smith" replica thinks of himself as being the John Smith who disappeared in the United States. After all possible tests have been made and have proved positive, the factors leading his friends to accept "John Smith" as John Smith would surely prevail and would cause them to overlook even his mysterious transference form one continent to another, rather than treat "John Smith," with all of John Smith's memories and other characteristics, as someone other that John Smith.[14]

When supplemented with a second supposition, this provides an illustration of reincarnation:

> Suppose, second, that our John Smith, instead of inexplicably disappearing, dies, but that at the moment of his death a "John Smith" replica, again complete with memories and all other characteristics, appears in India. Even with the corpse of our hands, we would, I think, still have to accept this "John Smith" as the John Smith who has died. We would just have to say that he had been miraculously re-created in another place.[15]

Then this is followed by an illustration of the case for resurrection:

> Now suppose, third, that on John Smith's death the "John Smith" replica appears, not in India, but as a resurrection replica in a different world altogether, a resurrection world inhabited only by resurrected persons. This world occupies its own space distinct from that with which we are not familiar. That is to say, an object in the resurrection world is not situated at any distance or in any direction from the objects in our present world, although each object in either world is spatially related to every other object in the same world.[16]

Human destiny, then, according to Christianity, is represented by resurrection. It should be noted that this conception is "to be distinguished form the unique resurrection of Jesus," as well as the "resustication of corpses in a cemetery."[17] The first case is beyond it, the second below it: what one has is *soma pneumatikon* a "spiritual body," which John Hick develops into "a model by which one may begin to conceive the divine recreation of the embodied human personality"[18] but by "ignoring Paul's own hint that it may be unlike the physical body as a full grain of wheat differs from a wheat seed," and by following instead the "view of some of the early Church Fathers that the resurrection body was the same shape as the physical body."[19]

The evidence from the primal religions in this connection is intriguingly varied and depends of the area tapped for it. In Africa, for instance, there are two pervasive beliefs, which would incline one to expect the presence of such a doctrine. One is the fact that, according to many African accounts current among the "Hottentots, Meru, Akamba, Zulu and many others," the first man had the "gift either of immortality or rising again after dying; though in some stories this gift never actually reached the first men, for various reasons." This was in an age when God dwelt with human beings and received many didactic gifts from God "on top of immortality, or rejuvenation or rising again after death. Even when man lost the higher gifts of immortality and resurrection, he was nevertheless equipped to survive and alive..."[20] Even while granting that *raising* from the dead is a somewhat different gift from *rising* from the dead, either performed right after death or after the body had been interred, the family resemblance with Christian

resurrection is clear. This observation may be coupled with the fact that, in African myths there "is the conviction, as in Genesis, that men were not meant to die."[21] Parrinder goes on the say:

> There is the further conviction that death is not the end. This is a universal belief, which is just as clear in Africa as anywhere else. It is not an unwillingness to face the fact of death, for that is recognized in the many funeral and memorial services, but it is a faith that the human spirit and the life force are indestructible. The details of the stories are of secondary importance, they are not meant to be taken literally or passed on as infallible truth, but behind them is one of the most deep-rooted of all the ideals of mankind.[22]

However, this confidence never culminates in a doctrine of resurrection. John S. Mbiti's observations apropos this point are so evocative and suggestive that they deserve to be cited in extenso:

> Yet behind these fleeting glimpses of the original state and bliss of man, whether they are rich or shadowy, there lie the tantalizing and unattained gift of the resurrection, the loss of human immortality and the monster of death. Here African religions and philosophy must admit a defeat: they have supplied no solution. This remains the most serious cul-de-sac in the otherwise rich thought and sensitive religious feeling of our peoples. It is perhaps here then that we find the greatest weakness and poverty of our traditional religions compared to world religions like Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism. These traditional religions cannot but remain tribal and nationalistic, since they do not offer for mankind at large, a way of 'escape,' a message of 'redemption' (however that might be conceived). Is it in this very issue, then, that these other religions have made a universal appeal and won adherents from all mankind? Do religions become universal only when they have been weaned from the cradle of looking towards the Zamani with all its mythological riches, and make a breakthrough towards the future with all the (mythological?) promises of 'redemption'? Such 'redemption' involves rescue from the monster of death, regaining immortality and attaining the gift of the resurrection. It is in this area that world religions may hope to 'conquer' African traditional religions and philosophy, not so much by coercion as by adding this new element to the two-dimensional life and thinking of African peoples. Only a three-dimensional religion can hope to last in modern Africa which is increasingly discovering and adjusting to an existential, and not only potential, third dimension of time.[23]

The situation, however, changes when one turns to Australia, where both the modes of post-mortem survival: resurrection and reincarnation, find a place.

> A crude form of the ideas connected with a renewed earthly life after death, or resurrection, may be seen among the Australian aborigines, who speak of the ghost returning at times to the grave and contemplating its mortal remains. Similarly, on the W. Coast of Africa 'it is the man himself in a shadowy or ghostly form that continues his existence after death.' The belief in the revivification of a dead person does not appear until the thaumaturgic stages of barbarous religion, when it becomes a favourite miracle, performed by a word of power or by the life-giving touch or contact with the body of the divine person.[24]

Familial and Communal Immortality

This section develops a hint provided by John Hick regarding the growth of belief in immortality in the Hebrew religion. He notes that it emerged towards the end of the Old Testament period:

> Only toward the end of the Old Testament period did afterlife come to have any real importance within Judaism. Previously, Hebrew religious insight had focused so fully upon God's covenant with the nation, as an organism that continued through the centuries while successive generations lived and died, that the thought of a divine purpose for the individual, a purpose transcending this present life, developed only when the breakdown of the nation as a political entity threw into prominence the individual and the question of personal destiny.[25]

Personal destiny, then, may be fulfilled in impersonal ways. One of these is through the prolongation of the family. As A.E. Crawley points out in relation to the Australian aborigines that

> the belief in a second life, or, rather, a series of lives, is a remarkable and regular feature of primitive thought. It takes the form of reincarnation; the dead are born again in their descendants, the idea being a natural inference from the resemblance of children to their parents and grandparents. The Central Australians have developed it into an elaborate theory of heredity, in which the 'life' is a germ-plasm. Other Australians evolved the notion that white men were blackfellows returned to life; 'tumble down blackfellow, jump up whitefellow' is a familiar phrase. The whiteness of the native corpse after cremation has been suggested as the basis of the notion.[26]

It is also echoed by Geoffrey Parrinder when he says in relation to Africa: "Men belong to a community and they are related to other beings, both

living and dead. The power of the dead man, if not his own personality, may return in a kind of reincarnation to strengthen his name, his property and his clan."[27] An even more penetrating picture is drawn by John S. Mbiti when he writes:

> This process continues on a personal level as long as someone who knew the living-dead is still alive. This may be up to four or five generations. By that time, the living-dead has sunk further and further into the Zamani period, with only loose strings of memory still holding him feebly in the human Sasa period. When the last person who knew him dies, the living-dead is entirely removed from the state of personal immortality, and he sinks beyond the horizon of the Sasa period. He is now dead, as far as human beings are concerned, and the process of dying is now completed. The living-dead is now a spirit, which enters the state of collective immortality. It has 'lost' its personal name, as far as human beings are concerned, and with it goes also the human personality. It is now an 'it' and no longer a 'he' or 'she'; it is now one of myriads of spirits who have lost their humanness. This, for all practical purposes, is the final destiny of the human soul. Man is ontologically destined to lose his humanness but gain his full spiritness; and there is no general evolution or devolution beyond that point. God is beyond, and in African concepts there is neither hope nor possibility that the soul would attain a share in the divinity of God.[28]

Does Shamanism Help?

Modern philosophers of religion no longer hesitate to draw on the findings of parapsychology for the light it might shed on issues of human destiny, immortality and resurrection.[29] Part of such research in parapsychology deals with the phenomenon of mediumship, clairvoyance and telepathy. In fact, one of the more interesting findings in the area seems to suggest that what are considered cases of clairvoyance (in connection with mediums) might really be cases of telepathy.[30]

In primal cultures the figure with whom such phenomena are associated is the *shaman*,[31] although his role in much more clearly institutionalized in a religious framework than of the spirit-medium in the modern. The *shaman* "specializes in the trance state, during which his soul is believed to leave his body and to ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld."[32] Mircea Eliade presents the following picture of an initiatory ordeal which precedes the acquisition of the authority of a shaman, based on a first person account of an Avam Somoyd shaman, as narrated to A.A. Popov:

> I shall select a few significant episodes. Stricken with smallpox, the future shaman remained unconscious for three days, so nearly dead that on the third day he was almost buried. He saw himself go down to Hell, and after many adventures he was carried to an island, in the middle of which stood a young birch tree, which reached up to Heaven. It was the Tree of the Lord of the Earth, who gave him a branch of it to make himself a drum. Next he came to a mountain. Passing through an opening, he met a naked man plying the bellows at an immense fire on which was a kettle. The man caught him with a hook, cut off his head, chopped his body to bits, and put the pieces into the kettle. There he boiled the body for three years, and then forged him a head on an anvil. Finally he fished out the bones, which were floating in a river, put them together, and covered them with flesh. During his adventures in the otherworld, the future shaman met several semidivine personages, in human or animal form, each of whom instructed him in the secrets of the healing art. When he awoke in his yurt, among his relatives, he was initiated and could begin to shamanize.[33]

Apart from effecting medical cures, the role of the *shaman* as a pshycopomp also must concern us here.

> In 1884 V.V. Radlov published the description of a seance organized to escort the soul of a woman to the underworld forty days after her death. The ceremony takes place in the evening. The shaman begins by circling the yurt, beating his drum; then he enters the tent and, going to the fire, invokes the deceased. Suddenly the shaman's voice changes; he begins to speak in a high-pitched falsetto, for it is really the dead woman who is speaking. She complains that she does not know the road, that she is afraid to leave her relatives, and so on, but finally consents to the shaman's leading her, and the two set off together for the subterranean realm. When they arrive, the shaman finds that the dead refuse to permit the newcomer to enter. Prayers proving ineffectual, brandy is offered; the seance gradually becomes more lively, even to the point of the grotesque, for the souls of the dead, through the shaman's voice, begin quarreling and singing together; finally they consent to receive the dead woman. The second part of the ritual represents the return journey; the shaman dances and shouts until he falls to the ground unconscious.[34]

Do Drugs Help?

Some of the practises of primal religions are associated with the use of psychedelic drugs[35] and this naturally raises the question: Do drugs have religious import?[36] Much has been written on the question[37] and what is about to be said is debatable, but it seems possible that some drugs may indeed have the effect of cleansing the doors of perception.

The well-known theologian, Harvey G. Cox had the following experience after ingesting mescalin with the Huicholes in Southern Mexico in a ritual setting. I leave it to the reader to assess its religious implication.

> Since we had no watches, I had no idea what time it was when one of the patients first noticed the morning star and pointed it out to us, glistening like a crown jewel over the eastern horizon. The other patients saw it and agreed it was beautiful, and then went back to whatever they were doing before. But I could not go back. In the church I belong to there is a group of young adults who like to sing selections from a nineteenth-century collection called *The Sacred Harp*, the oldest hymnbook still in use in America. They perform these old hymns with the same precision that other people devote to motets. One of the songs in this collection is a simple, stirring one entitled "Bright Morning Stars Are Rising." When I saw the morning star in the desert sky over San Luis Potosi State, I heard that hymn sung by a fifty-thousand-voice choir, or so it seemed. And it was all for me.
>
> Strong feelings often center on one concrete object. That is what makes a symbol a symbol. It becomes the receptacle or conduit for something far more than itself. That night the morning star became for me the sign of a universe that throbbed with love – not just general beneficence, but personally focused love, pouring through real people. Watching the morning star I felt more intensely than I ever had before what I have nearly always believed, and had sensed on some previous occasions: that "God is love" is not just a pious hope but a factual statement about the character of the universe. The morning star and the song about it fused. The song was the star and the star was the song.
>
> The feeling was too strong. At first I staggered out into the desert reaching toward the morning star. Then I fell, knelt, wept and cried, stood up, fell again. My knees shook and I trembled. Twice I tried to turn back toward the fire, away from the star. But each time its power turned me around and I was drawn toward it, only to stumble and fall again. I was deliriously happy. I thought of my family and my students, neighbors and friends – all the people whose love for me is a vehicle of the vital energy of the cosmos. Finally, exhausted from crying and weak with joy, I crept back to my colleagues around the fire and lay still.
>
> The vision was not "pantheistic." The morning star was not the object of my veneration. It was, to use very traditional language, "an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace," the standard textbook definition of a sacrament. Was it a "mystical experience"? I don't think so. I did not lose myself or merge with the star. I did not return as a drop of water to the great ocean or soar out of my body. I knew where I was and who I was at all times. What I felt was an Other moving toward me with a power of affirmation

beyond anything I had ever imagined could exist. I was glad and grateful. No theory that what happened to me was "artificially induced" or psychotic or hallucinatory can erase its mark. "The bright morning stars are rising," as the old hymn puts it, "in my soul."

A short time later a gray line appeared all along the eastern horizon. Each of us noticed it, one by one fell silent, and walked toward the eastern edge of our camp. The sun was about to rise.[38]

CHAPTER XIV

HUMAN DESTINY: KARMA AND REINCARNATION

Introduction

In Western religious and philosophical thought, a human being is generally supposed to be born once and to die once. Thus by life we mean a single life, by birth a single birth and by death a single death. There is no rebirth or reincarnation in Western religious thought such as is associated with Eastern religions like Hinduism and Buddhism. John Hick notes that Hindus, Buddhists and others see this Western stance as problematic. He writes:

> They point to the immense inequalities of human birth. One person is born with a healthy body and a high IQ, to loving parents with a good income in an advanced and affluent society, so that all the riches of human culture are available and the individual has considerable freedom to choose his or her own mode of life. Another is born with a crippled body and a low IQ, to unloving, unaffluent and uncultured parents in a society in which that person is highly likely to become a criminal and to die an early and violent death. Is it fair that they should be born with such unequal opportunities? If a new soul is created whenever a new baby is conceived, can the Creator who is responsible for each soul's unequal endowment be described as loving?

He goes on to say:

> We have all heard the story of John Bradford, who saw a criminal being taken to be hung and said. "But for the grace of God there goes John Bradford." The story is edifying insofar as it reminds us of God's grace to John Bradford; but what about God's grace, or lack of it, to the condemned criminal? The more one contemplates the gross inequalities of human birth,

> and our western religious assumption that human beings are divinely created in these different conditions, the more one is likely to see grave injustices here.[1]

On the other hand, the Hindus and the Buddhists argue in favour of reincarnation as follows:

> The alternative assumption of the religions of Indian origin is that we have all lived before and that the conditions of our present life are a direct consequence of our previous lives. There is no arbitrariness, no randomness, no injustice in the inequalities of our human lot, but only cause and effect, the reaping now of what we have ourselves sown in the past. Our essential self continues from life to life, being repeatedly reborn or reincarnated, the state of its karma determining the circumstances of its next life.[2]

The basic point at issue in the debate here is equality and justice. When evidence from the primal religious traditions, especially from those of Africa is introduced, the perspective undergoes a major transformation. But it should be noted at the very outset that even in Africa "Differences of character and status are explained by reference to the incarnating spirit, and part of the importance of the idea of reincarnation is that it provides an explanation of differences in the social hierarchy by the philosophy of power."[3] The first modification concerns this very fact, but let us begin by observing that the phenomenon of reincarnation is identifiable in Africa and its description may be kept simple at this stage, although it will become more complex as we proceed. At this point it should suffice to realise that the phenomena exists. As John S. Mbiti states: "Belief in reincarnation is reported among many African societies"[4] and this belief "held in Africa resembles Indian belief in reincarnation,"[5] though with important differences.

One such important difference is that while in Indian thought the pivot on which the wheel of rebirth turns is morality, in Africa it is power. This is not to suggest that moral considerations are entirely absent: among the Ibos, for instance, evil people are said to have an inauspicious reincarnation, so that a moral element enters into the picture straightaway. "A great curse on evil-doers declares 'may you not reincarnate in human form,' and those who are born in an abnormal manner, with feet first or having buck teeth, are looked on with fear as bringing evil power to birth."[6] However, while rebirth and karma, or the moral quality of one's actions, are corollaries in Indian thought, they do not necessarily go together in African primal thought. As Geoffrey Parrinder points out:

> African belief starts from different presuppositions and flows from its philosophy of power. It is not belief in a collection of individual souls coming back to higher or lower levels in this unreal world, and finally escaping altogether. That which is passed on from elders to children is the force which makes life possible and through which property is inherited.

> This is not based on moral judgements, but anything which blocks the linking of power, like witchcraft which is thought to cause sterility or prevent babies from being born and surviving, is condemned as very evil. Rebirth is therefore into the same family, to strengthen it with sure links of continuity. And because the African world view, like the Biblical, is world-affirming there is none of the Indian notion of world-denial which sees punishment or loss in being born at all and holds out hope of escape into a featureless *nirvana*. For African return to this world of light and warmth is far preferable to the cold of the beyond.[7]

The Popular Concept

According to John Hick the popular doctrine of reincarnation in India is based on the claimed[8] memories of past lives, "To spell this out in the well-known case of Shanti Devi: Lugdi – who was born in 1902, lived in Muthra, and died in 1924 as Mrs. Chaubey – was (presumably) very different as regards both physical and psychological descriptions from Shanti Devi, who was born in 1926 and lived at Delhi. But Shanti Devi claimed to have certain memories of people and events experienced by Lugdi, which are said to have been confirmed by impartial investigators."[9]

The problem John Hick has with this popular concept has to do with the problem of identity. He begins by asking how we establish personal identity over any stretch of time and discounts the claim that this could be established on a physical or psychological basis. He takes his own example, and compares himself when he was two to when he is sixty-six. He observes: "No doubt the same personality traits are present in both the child and the man, but nevertheless the conscious self of one is very different from the conscious self of the other – so much so that a comparison of the two would never by itself lead us to conclude that they are the same self."[10] However, "Notwithstanding that, J.H.^{66} does have at least one fragmentary memory of an event which was experienced by J.H.^{2} He remembers being told when his sister who is two years younger than himself was born... Thus there is a tenuous memory link connecting J.H.^{66} with J.H.^{2} despite all the dissimilarities that we have noted between them; and this fact reminds us that it is possible to speak of memory across the gap of almost any degree of physical and psychological difference."[11]

In the typical Indian case, then, one is reborn in a *different* family. In the typical African case, however, one is reborn in the *same* family, so that many of the objections directed by Hick against the Indian case do not apply in this case with the same force. Noel Q. King states: "In conclusion we may return briefly to speak of the dead person. By the passage of time and the agency of various ceremonies he becomes a member of the group Dr. Mbiti

aptly terms ‘the living-dead’, a remembered ancestor who has power to bring blessing or illness upon his descendants, someone who also comes to be born again in a new baby member of the group. The circuit and cycle is complete and continues to turn in accordance with the great universal rhythm.”[12]

Professor King refers to Dr. Mbiti, who has this to say on the subject:

> Belief in reincarnation is reported among many African societies. This is, however, partial reincarnation in the sense that only some human features or characteristics of the living-dead are said to be ‘reborn’ in some children. This happens chiefly in the circle of one’s family and relatives. The living-dead who has been reincarnated continues, however, to have his separate existence and does not cease to be. I suspect that this belief is partly the result of externalizing people’s awareness of the nearness of their living-dead, and partly an attempt to explain what is otherwise a purely biological phenomenon which applies not only to human beings but also to animals. Those who hold someone in the state of personal immortality see biological or character resemblances in a young child, and immediately feel that since the particular living-dead has not yet sunk into the oblivion of the Zamani period, he has ‘returned’ to them. It pains the community, therefore, that someone should die without getting married, since this dwindles the chances of his being ‘reborn.’

Dr. Mbiti goes on to say:

> Anybody can be reincarnated in this way, whether married or not, whether young or old, but it is mainly those who have had children of their own, and in some societies it is definitely said that a person who is unmarried or has no children cannot be reincarnated. In practice only a few people are actually ‘reborn’ in them. Although the belief in partial reincarnation exists, it is not expected that everybody will automatically be ‘reborn’; and the belief is not reported at all in some societies. When relatives notice that one of their living-dead has been reincarnated, they rejoice about it and this is another level of keeping warm the relationship between the two parties. Once the living-dead has moved on into the Zamani period and into the state of ordinary spirits reincarnation for him ceases. This means, therefore, that it and when partial reincarnation does take place, it is a temporary phenomenon during the intermediate period when the living-dead is still in the state of personal immortality. The soul of man is destined to become an ordinary spirit, and once that stage is reached, there is no more possibility of its returning to the human mode of existence. In some societies the spirit (or the living-dead) is thought to visit human beings in the form of snakes, rats, lizards or other animals, which may not be killed.[13]

There are thus major differences between the Indian and African instances. John Hick is sceptical about identifying Lugdi with Shanti Devi.

He writes:

> How many people of Lugdi's generation were as much like Shanti Devi in general character as Lugdi was? Probably many hundreds of thousands. How many people in the last generation before I was born had character traits similar to those that I have? Probably many hundreds of thousands. On this basis alone, then, it would never have occurred to anyone that Lugdi and Shanti Devi were the same person, or that I am the same person as any one particular individual who lived in the past. On this basis I could equally well be a reincarnation of any one of many thousands of people in each past generation. Thus, this criterion of character similarity is far too broad and permissive; if it establishes anything, it establishes much too much and becomes self-defeating.[14]

However, if it was claimed that Shanti Devi was born in the *same* family as Lugdi – the Africanized version of the Indian case – would it justify the same degree of scepticism?

The Vedantic Conception

John Hick differentiates the popular Hindu conception from the more sophisticated Vedantic one, namely, one based on scriptural rather than popular Hinduism. According to this view the human personality consists of three bodies. These three bodies are called (1) the gross body (*sthūla śarīra*); (2) the subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*) and (3) the causal body (*kāraṇa śarīra*). The gross body corresponds to the physical body and the subtle body to the soul – so called because the soul is subtler than matter. One could also refer to the subtle body as consisting of the psyche and this is helpful, in the sense that the Vedantic concept of the subtle body combines some characteristics of the human personality associated with the mind in Western thought, on the one hand, and some with the soul, on the other. Thus the subtle body consists of the "mental stuff" but is also able to leave the body like the soul. In some contexts this body is also called the *liṇga śarīra*. The causal body is so called because it is said to be the cause of both the gross and the subtle body. This is the doctrine of the three bodies in the Vedānta, namely, the doctrine that although superficially viewed a human being seems to possess only one "body," in reality he or she possesses three bodies: the gross body (*sthūla śarīra*), the subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*) and the causal body (*kāraṇa śarīra*)

> So far as the essential logic of the idea of rebirth is concerned, we can combine the latter two into one, the "subtle body," and concentrate upon the relation between this and the "gross body." The "gross body" is the physical

> organism that begins to be formed at conception and begins to disintegrate at death. It is survived by the "subtle body," which then influences the development of another physical body as its next vehicle of incarnation. It must, however, at once be added that the phrase "subtle body" is likely to be seriously misleading to the western mind, for the "subtle body" is not, in the philosophically sophisticated versions of the theory, conceived of as a material entity in the western sense of "material." It does not occupy space, has no shape or size, and is indeed not a body at all in our western sense of the term.[15]

John Hick directs several objections against this version of the doctrine of karma. He argues, first of all, as follows: "The claim here, then, is that there will in the future exist a supernormal state of consciousness, in which 'memories' of a long succession of different lives occur. However, this leaves open the question of how best to describe such a state of affairs. Let us name the first person in the series A and the last Z. Are we to say that B-Z are a series of reincarnations of A? If we do, we shall be implicitly stipulating the following definition: given two or more non-contemporaneous human lives, if there is a higher consciousness in which they are all 'remembered,' then each later individual in the series is defined as being a reincarnation of each earlier individual. But reincarnation so defined is a concept far removed from the idea that if I am A, then I shall be repeatedly reborn as B-Z."[16] He then goes on to say: (2) "Further, there is no conceptual reason why we should even stipulate that the different lives must be noncontemporaneous. If it is possible for a higher consciousness to 'remember' any number of different lives, there seems in principle to be no reason why it should not 'remember' lives that have been going on at the same time as easily as lives that have been going on at different times. Indeed, we can conceive of an unlimited higher consciousness in which 'memories' occur of all human lives that have ever been lived. Then *all* human lives, however different from their own several points of view, would be connected via a higher consciousness in the way postulated by the idea of reincarnation."[17] From this he draws the following conclusion "It would then be proper to say of *any* two lives, whether earlier and later or contemporaneous, that the one individual is a different incarnation of the other. Thus it seems that there are conceptual difficulties in the idea of reincarnation it its more subtle Vedantic from as well as in its more popular form."[18]

From a primal perspective, as presented through the African material, *the objections raised by John Hick have actually been accepted as reincarnatory possibilities*.

(1) The first criticism pertains to lack of firm identity among the transmigratory units. Here African tradition provides for transmigratory spillage. For what transmigrates is not the well-heeled *liṅga-śarīra* of

Hinduism but what Tempels has described as an 'ontological influence', and African complexity is in keeping with this fluidity. Geoffrey Parrinder points out:

> Yet African belief is complex. Ancestors are reincarnated yet offerings are still made to them at their graves; they are in heaven, yet back on earth, and they may enter not only one body but perhaps several. That a dead person may be reborn in several descendants has suggested to some writers that Africans are not logical in their thinking, or are 'pre-logical', but in fact these agrees quite well with the philosophy of power, for one force can strengthen or weaken another or several, and wisdom and happiness are increased by the influence of the dead forebears. So it is not the single 'soul' of the ancestor that passes from one embodiment to another in an endless round or chain of existence.[19]

(2) As for the why reincarnation must be sequential and not simultaneous, apart from the general comments made above, the Ila specifically believe that "the same spirit may descend upon two bodies."[20]

A few additional points also deserve consideration in the course of this comparison of Indian and African material. (1) Surprise was expressed by some writers that, in the African case, "ancestors are reincarnated yet offerings are still made to them at their graves; they are in heaven yet back on earth..."[21] This has been the standard situation in ritualistic Hinduism for centuries – leading to efforts to reconcile the *śrāddha* ceremony for the departed ancestors, with belief in the doctrine of *karma*. (2) John S. Mbiti speaks of the living-dead. They are called *pretas* in Hinduism and it is interesting that offerings have to be made to them up to seven generations. This is where the *śrāddha* mentioned earlier comes in too. As in the African case the Hindus too, as "human beings keep the relationship going between them and their living-dead, chiefly through libation, offerings of food and other items, prayers and the observation of proper rites towards the departed or instructions from them."[22]

(3) John Hick alluded to the Hindu goal of *mokṣa* or freedom from rebirths. John S. Mbiti describes one such state of salvation as follows:

> When the last person who knew him dies, the living-dead is entirely removed from the state of personal immortality, and he sinks beyond the horizon of the Sasa period. He is now dead, as far as human beings are concerned, and the process of dying is now completed. The living-dead is now a spirit, which enters the state of collective immortality. It has 'lost' its personal name, as far as human beings are concerned, and with it goes also the human personality. It is now an 'I'' and no longer a 'he' or 'she'; it is now one of myriads of spirits who have lost their humanness. This, for all practical purposes, is the final destiny of the human soul. Man is

> ontologically destined to lose his humanness but gain his full spiritness; and there is no general devolution or devolution beyond that point. God is beyond, and in African concepts there is neither hope nor possibility that the soul would attain a share in the divinity of God.[23]

Such a view is actually found in Hinduism. It represents the merger of the soul in Brahman. John S. Mbiti adds, however, that "God is beyond, and in African concepts there is neither hope nor possibility that the soul would attain a share in the divinity of God." [24] The position in mainline Hinduism was stated above, but his particular position also has a place in Vedantic Hinduism. The main difference is that the Hindu view does allow for a "share in the divinity."

(4) The fact that according to African belief an "ancestor can be reborn in several people at once" [25] is perhaps also capable of being understood in terms of Hindu analytical categories.[26]

A Demythologized Version

J.G. Jennings[27] has presented what may be called a demythologized version of the Karma doctrine. According to him, the Buddha could not accept the Hindu doctrine of Karma in good faith once he had rejected the concept of an abiding entity called the soul. The doctrine of Karma applies to the effects of *individual* deeds but for the Buddha such 'individuality' did not really exist. However, according to Jennings, the Buddha "fully accepted the doctrine of Karma in another sense, implying the transmission of effects of actions from one *generation* of men to all succeeding generations."[28] He goes on to aver that "assuming the common origin of all life and spirit, he [the Buddha] assumed the unity of the force of Karma upon the living material of the whole world, and the doctrine of Karma taught by him is *collective* and not individual."[29]

Irrespective of whether such an interpretation of Buddha's view of Karma be acceptable or not,[30] this particular concept of Karma deserves consideration in its own right. John Hick finds it an appealing idea for he writes: "Most western philosophers would probable have no difficulty accepting this last form of reincarnation doctrine, for it is a vivid affirmation of human unity; the world today is such that if we do not unite in a common life, we are only too likely to find ourselves united in a common death."[31]

Given the more collective orientation of primal religions one would expect such an interpretation to resonate positively with the primal matrix. Curiously, however, although primal religions abound in affirmations of collectivity and solidarity the doctrine of reincarnation seems to retain its individualistic character even in communal contexts. For instance, in Africa,

"The spirit of the departed may continue to play an active part in the national affairs of the people (by being reincarnated, possessing the successor or recognized medium, and being consulted or having sacrifices and offerings given to it)"[32] The evidence on reincarnation from among American Indians seems to support this view[33] and when Jamake Highwater surfaces with a concept similar to that of Karma it seems to emphasize the recognition of differences.

> There is absolutely nothing 'mystical' – in the popular and very negative sense of that term – in the *notion that everything that happens to us, everything we think, everything we envision, imagine, conceive, perceive, dream, and intuit, is a real and vital part of our lives*. And it is at the very least in this metaphoric frame of mind (if we cannot manage to discard all limits placed upon reality) that we must try to grasp the experiences of peoples from drastically different worlds than ours in the West.[34]

A Historicized Version

According to one version of the Karma doctrine, different spirits continue to be reborn not just temporally, but 'historically', when their Karma becomes embedded in a slice of history as well as family. G. Parrinder writes:

> Records of slaves in the eighteenth century show a high proportion of suicides, partly from despair but also it is said with the hope of being reborn in their native land. Because of this their owners cut off the heads of suicide slaves to suggest that they would be reborn mutilated. South American Africans today believe that dreams indicate which ancestor is being reborn in a child. A man can be reborn as a woman, but never as an animal, though animals can be reborn among themselves. An ancestor can be reborn in several people at once, and gifts may be presented to the newborn child under the ancestor's name, as well as to the ancestor himself at his grave. A reborn spirit is called 'the spirit which comes back to see the world.' Criminals become ghosts and are not usually believed to be reborn. There is normally thought to be a limit to the number of times rebirth takes place; some say three times, others up to twelve times, and after that the *liberated soul* becomes a soldier of the highest spirits.[35]

CONCLUSION

I

One may begin this last chapter by stating what should by now be obvious: that primal religions have certainly their own perspective to offer, and often a fresh perspective to offer, on virtually all the themes regularly investigated in the philosophy of religion. In that sense it might be misleading to frame a question such as the following: what is the distinct contribution of primal religions to the philosophy of religion? Such a question, by its very framing, might tend to obscure the fact that primal religions have something to contribute to virtually every aspect of the philosophy of religion.

This comprehensiveness of the contribution forthcoming from primal religions, which we here associate with them in relation to the philosophy of religion, is not unique to the philosophy of religion. It also holds good when primal religions are considered in relation to other disciplines, such as the History of Religions. Professor Lawrence E. Sullivan has, for instance, demonstrated how primal religions have something to contribute to our understanding of the themes traditionally dealt with under the rubric of History of Religions, such as sacrifice, performance arts, music, the body, questions of religious authority, death and even astronomy, etc.[1]

This said, on may ask the same question once again: what is the distinct contribution of the primal religions to the philosophy of religion? This time the answer could be that primal religions contribute to the Western philosophy of religion much the same way as any non-Western religious tradition contributes to it: by adding nuance to its existing concepts. Zoroastrian dualism, for instance, sheds light on Western concepts of Good and Evil; Iroquois dualism and its twin mythology could in turn be compared to that of Zoroastrianism. The concept of dualism will then be found to be similar but its significance may differ. Similarly, Iroquois dualism could be compared directly to the philosophy of religion in the manner the question of evil is posed. And here again either the concepts may differ; or, when they do not differ their significance may be different.

This leads us to ask the same question a third time: is emphasizing its own distinctness the distinct contribution of primal religions to the philosophy of religion? It might be a mistake to think so, because the various primal religions do not speak with one voice. On the face of it this might seem to lend strength to the argument that emphasizing distinctness could well be the contribution primal religions have to make to philosophical

discourse. Nevertheless, to the extent that the primal religions have had to discover their own voice regarding how to deal with several voices, they have tended to assume a pluralistically tolerant approach. The different voices then are not seen as constituting a cacophony, which must be suppressed in order to enable one voice to prevail and to be heard, but a symphony in which all voices may find their place. This may be another gift which primal religions bring in their magic casements.

II

There is, however, one way in which the primal religions could be understood as making a contribution to the philosophy of religion as a whole, if we choose to ask the same question a fourth time. Since we have been labouring the question to death, the answer this time may be offered laconically. Philosophy of religion sees itself as primarily concerned with search for truth, as distinguished from search for meaning. Primal religions, to the extent that they may be equally concerned with both, may serve to mitigate the arid stratospheric objectivity of the discipline, by highlighting the fact that there is, in the end, still a person at the root of it all, who finds meaning in searching for truth.

III

We have now arrived at the last section of the last chapter. This broad survey must now be brought to a conclusion. What have we accomplished by undertaking it?

The accomplishment of any task should be judged in terms of goals it sets out to accomplish. We have come a long way from the Introduction, all the way to the Conclusion. It might therefore be wise to remind ourselves of the reason for which the exercise was undertaken.

One primary purpose of this book was to *de-exoticize* the primal religions, far as the philosophy of religion is concerned, so that the philosophical insights found within them cease to appear remote from the concerns of the philosophy of religion. We sought to achieve this goal by demonstrating, chapter after chapter, how the primal religions contained philosophical material relevant to the kinds of issues by grappling with which the philosophy of religion has become what it is. We hope this demonstration has brought us closer to the realization, that the fact that primal religions are in some way archaic does not mean that they are anachronistic, so far as the philosophy of religion is concerned. In a way primal religions are not archaic but modern, or even quite contemporary, because they do address issues a modern philosophy of religion is concerned with.

In fact, in this respect, one can go even further. One can even turn the tables and argue that primal religions and *their* philosophical perspectives are even *more* relevant for the modern world than the perspectives canvassed within the philosophy of religion as traditionally practised. The philosophy of religion is a post-Enlightenment phenomenon and therefore part and parcel of the project of modernity. But primal religions have had to confront this modernity at its most brutal. They have done so bravely and withstood its ravages. One must not romantically imagine that the primal societies were left to themselves in sublime isolation and modernity passed them by. Many people whom we now regard as plains Indians, for instance, such as the Lakota, were displaced there as the 'West was won'! So now when modernity, it turns out, has to confront its own ravages, the primal religions may have something to offer. This something may not be as easily forthcoming from a philosophy of religion, conventionally understood. It may be carrying the very poison within itself, so to say, for which one is seeking a remedy. In a somewhat surprising turn-around then, the pre-modern becomes the post-modern and the remote the proximate!

ENDNOTES

PREFACE

1. Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and Science* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 162-163.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
3. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989) p. 21.
4. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (second edition) (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann International, 1969) p. 3.

INTRODUCTION

1. See, in that order, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: William Benton, 1967) Vol. 18, p. 519; S.G.F. Brandon, *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (New York; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970) p. 622; William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, eds., *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972) p. 5; Mary Pat Fischer, *Living Religions* (third edition) (Upper Saddle River, CA: Prentice Hall, 1997) Chapter 2; Nobutaka Inoue *Folk Beliefs in Modern Japan* (Tokyo: Kokugakuin University, 1994); Sam Gill, *Native American Religions: An Introduction* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982); Ian Keen, *Knowledge and Secrecy in Aboriginal Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) p. 365; William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 381; and Joseph M. Kitagawa, "Religious Communities," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) Vol. 12, p. 303.
2. Joseph M. Kitagawa, *op. cit.*, p. 303; Huston Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 305; etc.
3. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology* (London: Cohen & West, 1951) p. 7; also see Sam Gill, *Beyond "the Primitive": The Religions of Non-Literate Peoples* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1982). For more on how primitive religion is not primitive, also see Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986) p. 95 note 15.
4. Huston Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 374-375.
5. Mary Pat Fischer, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 69, 189.
7. S.G.F. Brandon, *op. cit.*, p. 289.
8. Mary Pat Fischer, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39. The view of Tor Andrae "that primitive religions as we know them now are not to be confused with the original religions" may belong here, see Annemarie Schimmel, "Tor Andrae," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 272.
9. Robert Bellah, "Religious Evolution," in William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, eds., *op.cit.*, pp. 36-50.
10. See John M. Watanabe, "Maya Religion"; Pierre Duiols, "Inca Religion"; and David Carrasco, "Aztec Religion" in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 9, pp. 298-301; Vol. 7, pp. 152-156 and Vol. 2, pp. 23-29 respectively.
11. Mary Pat Fischer, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

12. *Ibid*.
13. *Ibid*., p. 42.
14. Eric J. Sharpe, "Anthropology," in S.G.F. Brandon, ed., *op. cit*., p. 84; Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit*., Vol. 11, p. 472; Adolf E. Jensen, *Myth and Cult among Primitive Peoples* (tr. Marianna Tax Choldin and Wolfgang Weissleder) (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1962) p. 17-19, 37.
15. Joseph M. Kitagawa, *op. cit*., p. 303.
16 For more on "archaic" see Charles H. Long, *op. cit*., p. 8-9, 38, 43, 46-47, 51, 59, 62, 72, 73. The theory of survival is not without its critics, see Michael P. Carroll, "Durkheim on the emergence of religion: Reviewing the archaeological evidence (at last)," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* Vol. 17 Number 3 (1988) pp. 291-301. Also see David S. Noss and John B. Noss, *A History of the World's Religions* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994) p. 3.
17. Sam D. Gill, *op. cit*., p. 6-7; Mircea Eliade, *From Primitives to Zen: a Thematic Sourcebook of the History of Religions* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1967) p. 3.
18. Philip Babcock Gove, ed., *op. cit*., p. 147. See Walter F. Vella, ed., *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia by G. Coedes* (Honolulu: East-West Press, 1968) p. 33.
19. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, "Religious Diversity," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit*., Vol. 12, p. 313. Theodore M. Ludwig, "Gods and Goddesses," *ibid*., Vol. 6, p. 63.
20. Ugo Bianchi, "History of Religions," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit*., Vol. 6, p. 405.
21. Henry R. Luce, Editor in Chief, *The World's Great Religions* (New York: Time Incorporated, 1957) p. 1, by implication.
22. Niels C. Nielsen, Jr. *et al*. *Religions of the World* (third edition) (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993) p. 29, 36.
23. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *op. cit*., p. 313.
24. See Marion Lundy Dobbert, *Ethnographic Research: Theory and Application for Modern Schools and Societies* (New York: Praeger, 1982).
25. Joseph M. Kitagawa, *op. cit*., p. 303.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (fourth edition) (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1990) p. 1.
30. *Ibid*., p. 2.
31. *Ibid*., p. 2.
32. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1969) p. 25.
33. *Ibid.*
34. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (second edition) (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann International, 1969) p. 3.
35. *Ibid*., p. 29.
36. It may be worth adding that the "lack of literature in tropical Africa is a result of isolation, not of African inability to express thoughts. The ancient north Europeans and

Americans had no writing till it was brought to them by visitors from other countries. There was no literature for the ancient religions of these continents until well into the Christian era and knowledge of them was often preserved by Christian missionaries, as has happened in Africa too” (*ibid*., p. 18).

37. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit*., p. 25.
38. Such as the Odu corpus among the Yoruba, see Noel Q. King, *Religions of Africa* (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, 1970) p. 18.
39. *Ibid*., p. 18.
40. *Ibid*., p. 21.
41. Noel Q. King, *op. cit*., p. 81.
42. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit*., p. 25.
43. See John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 2.
44. Charles Long, “Religion, Primitive,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: William Benton, 1966) Vol. 19, p. 110.
45. Johannes Maringer, *The Gods of Prehistoric Man* (Tr. and ed. Mary Ilford. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960) Chapter IV.
46. John F. Haught, *What is Religion? An Introduction* (New York and New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990) p. 17, emphasis added.
47. *Ibid*., p. 20-21.
48. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 3.
49. Benjamin C. Ray, “African Religion,” in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) Vol. I, p. 62.
50. *Ibid*.
51. H.B. Alexander, “Philosophy (Primitive),” in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1917) Vol. IX, p. 844.
52. See K. James McNeley, *Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1981).
53. *Ibid*., p. 166.
54. H.B. Alexander, *op. cit*., p. 846.
55. S.G. Youngert, “Salvation (Teutonic),” in James Hastings, ed., *op. cit*., Vol. XI, p. 150.
56. H.B. Alexander, *op. cit*., p. 845.
57. Lawrence E. Sullivan, “Supreme Beings,” in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit*., Vol. 14, p. 180.
58. See John G. Gaeger, *Kingdom and Community: A Social World of Early Christianity* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1975); Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Elaine Pagels. *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988); etc.
59. Lawrence E. Sullivan, “Dissonant Human Histories and the Vulnerability of Understanding,” in Steven Friesen, ed., *Local Knowledge, Ancient Wisdom: Challenges to Contemporary Spirituality* (Honolulu: East-West Center, 1991) p. 16.
60. Rubelite Kawena Johnson, “Hawaiian Spirituality and Physical Realities,” in Steven Friesen, ed., *op. cit*., p. 8.

61. S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959) p. 326-327.
62. Donald R. Hill, "Magic in Primitive Societies," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
64. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
65. Jill Raitt, "Embodied Christianity," in Steven Friesen, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 17.
66. See Ian Stevenson, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975) Vol. I.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
68. *Ibid.* p. 201.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 337.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 355-356.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 228.
76. James A. Boon, "Anthropology, Ethnology and Religion," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 309.

CHAPTER I

1. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, (London: Sheldon Press, 1969) p. 39. The figure of the Goddess per se also surfaces in the primal tradition, as in southern Nuba in Africa (*ibid.*, p. 42). For more on this in larger perspective see Marija A. Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess* (San Francisco, Cal.: Harper San Francisco, 1991).
2. Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) P. 169.
3. John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (fourth edition) (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990) p. 5.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.
7. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford; Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1990: second revised and enlarged edition) p. 7.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
11. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, p. 46.
12. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
13. F.M. Bergounioux, and Joseph Goetz, S.J., *Prehistoric and Primitive Religions* (London: Burns & Oates, 1965) p. 85.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
15. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
16. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
17. H.L. Goudge, *infra*, p. 747.
18. Raymond J. DeMallie, "Lakota Belief and Ritual in the Nineteenth Century," in Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks, *Sioux Indian Religion* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) p. 29.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, p. 3, 29, etc.
21. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, p. 32.
22. *Ibid.*
23. H.L. Goudge, "Revelation," in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919) Vol. X, p. 746, emphasis added.
24. Jamake Highwater, *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981) p. 82-85, emphasis added.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
26. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit.*, p. 56:

    It emerges clearly that for African peoples, this is a religious universe. Nature in the broadest sense of the word is not an empty impersonal object or phenomenon: it is filled with religious significance. Man gives life even where natural objects and phenomena have no biological life. God is seen in and behind these objects and phenomena: they are His creation, they manifest Him, they symbolize His being and presence. The invisible world is symbolized or manifested by these visible and concrete phenomena and objects of nature. The invisible world presses hard upon the visible: one speaks of the other, and African peoples 'see' that invisible universe when they look at, hear or feel the visible and tangible world. This is one of the most fundamental religious heritages of African peoples. It is unfortunate that foreign writers, through great ignorance, have failed to understand this deep religious insight of our peoples; and have often either ridiculed it, or naively presented it as 'nature worship' or 'animism.' Traditional African societies have been neither deaf nor blind to the spiritual dimension of existence, which is so deep, so rich and so beautiful.
27. Theodore M. Ludwig, "Monotheism," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) Volume 10, p. 75.
28. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 5. By contrast *Native American Religions: An Introduction* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982) by Sam D. Gill does not even have an index entry for God or Monotheism.
29. Also see Paul Radin, "Monotheism Among American Indians," in Dennis Tedlock and Barbara Tedlock, eds., *Teachings from the American Earth: Indian Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Liveright, 1975).
30. Theodore M. Ludwig, *op. cit.*, Vol. 10, p. 69. For an assessment of his views see Lawrence E. Sullivan, "Supreme Beings," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 14, p. 176-178.
31. Theodore M. Ludwig, "Monotheism," *op. cit.*, vol. 10, p. 69.

32. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, Chapter I. See Mircea Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (tr. Rosemary Sheed. Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966) Chapter II.
33. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960) as cited by Theodore M. Ludwig "Monotheism," *op. cit.*, Vol. 10, p. 74-75.
34. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
36. Theodore M. Ludwig, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
37. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
38. Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Schucken Books, 1972) p. xxi.
39. Paul Radin, "Monotheism Among American Indians," in Dennis Tadlock and Barbara Tadlock, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 245 and passim.
40. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (New Delhi: Indus, 1993) p. 40.
41. The evidence of some of the scholars cited here has however been problematized recently as unduly coloured by the host Western culture; see Wendy Rose, "The Great Pretenders: Further Reflections on white shamanism," in M. Annette Jaimes, ed., *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization and Resistance* (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1992) pp. 403-421.
42. Jamake Highwater, p. 66.
43. John H. Hick. *op. cit.*, p. 6-7.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
45. Huston Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 376.
46. This could be an exaggeration, see Lawrence E. Sullivan, "Supreme Beings," *op. cit.*, p. 167.
47. Huston Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 377.
48. Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973) Chapter 8. For a more recent edition see *God is Red: A Native View of Religion. A Classic Work Updated* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Publishers, 1994).
49. *Ibid.*
50. Huston Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

CHAPTER II

1. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religions* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958) p. 39. It should be noted, however, that some people might call God as Sky "But without confusing him with the material firmament," while others call God, Sky, "linking him fairly closely to cosmology if not actually identifying him with the world order" (F.M. Bergounioux, O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz, S.J. *op. cit.*, p. 84).
2. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
5. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
6. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

7. *Ibid*., Chapters 2 and 3.
8. *Ibid*., p. 32-33.
9. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 8. This point is developed as follows in the modern philosophy of religion as presented by John H. Hick (*ibid*., p. 7-8): "It is this insistence that God is unlimited being that let Paul Tillich to hold that we should not say even that God *exists*, since this would be a limiting statement. "Thus the question of the existence of God can be neither asked nor answered. If asked, it is a question about that which by its very nature is above existence, and therefore the answer – whether negative or affirmative – implicitly denies the nature of God. It is as atheistic to affirm the existence of God as it is to deny it. God is being-itself, not a being." This paradox, as it must sound in the mouth of a theologian, that "God does not exist" is however not as startling as it may at first appear. It operates as a vivid repudiation of every form of belief in a finite deity. Tillich means, not that the term 'God' does not refer to any reality but that the reality to which it refers is not merely one among others, not even the first or the highest, but rather the very source and ground of all being. Tillich was, in effect, urging a restriction of the term "exists" to the finite and created realm, thereby rendering it improper either to affirm or to deny the existence of the infinite creator. But it is only on the basis of this restricted usage that Tillich repudiated the statement that God exists. He was emphasizing the point, which was familiar to the medieval scholastics, that the creator and the created cannot be said to exist in precisely the same sense."
10. *Ibid*., p. 8.
11. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit*., p. 40-41.
12. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 33.
13. *Ibid*., p. 33-34.
14. Wilhelm Dupré, *Religion in Primitive Culture: A Study in Etnophilosophy* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975) p. 249.
15. Vine Deloria, Jr. *op. cit*., p. 91.
16. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 9.
17. *Ibid*., p. 9.
18. Raymond J. DeMallie, *op. cit*., p. 28.
19. D.M. Dooling, *The Sons of the Wind* (Harper San Francisco, 1992) p. ix.
20. The Hopi view of time is parademattic for primal religions in this respect, see Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 104-109.
21. Huston Smith, *op. cit*., p. 367.
22. Vine Deloria, Jr., *op. cit*., Chapter 6.
23. *Ibid*.
24. *Ibid*., pp. 106-109. Also see Jamake Highwater, p. 105-106.
25. See Hanns J. Prem, "Toltec Religion," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit*., Vol 14, p. 549.
26. Cited in Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 89-90.
27. Cited in Vine Deloria, Jr., *op. cit*., p. 95.
28. *Ibid*.
29. F.M. Bergounioux O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz, S.J., *op. cit*., p. 75-76; John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 15-16.

30. *Ibid*., p. 15-16.
31. *Ibid*., p. 22-23.
32. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, p. 40-41.
33. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 11.
34. F.M. Bergounioux & Joseph Goetz, *op. cit*., p. 95.
35. *Ibid*.
36. *Ibid*., p. 92.
37. *Ibid*., p. 95.
38. The following historical note may not be devoid of interest on this point. "Like his contemporaries, Andrew Lang was an evolutionary theorist, but he refused to accept that gods could have developed out of ghosts or spirits. He wrote with much good sense – though with some nonsense also – but, partly because the animistic origin of religion was so generally taken as evident, what he said about primitive religion was ignored till he was later vindicated by Wilhelm Schmidt. It was also because he was a romantic man of letters who wrote on such subjects as Prince Charles Edward and Mary Stuart, and so could be dismissed as a litterateur and dilettante. He was an animist in that he agreed with Tylor that belief in souls, and subsequently in spirits, might well have arisen from psychical phenomena (dreams, & c.) *but he was not prepared to accept that the idea of God arose as a late development from the notions of souls, ghosts, and spirits. He pointed out that the conception of a creative, moral, fatherly, omnipotent, and omniscient God is found among the most primitive peoples of the globe*, and is probably to be accounted for by what used to be known as the argument from design, a rational conclusion by primitive man that the world around him must have been made by some superior being. However this might be, on the evolutionists' own criteria, *the idea of God*, being found among the *culturally simplest peoples*, could not be a *late development from the ideas of ghost and soul* or indeed anything else. Moreover, says Lang, the supreme being of these peoples is, at any rate in many cases, not thought of as spirit at all, at least in our sense of divine spirit – 'God is a spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth' – but rather as what we might speak of as some sort of person. Therefore he concludes that the conception of god 'need not be evolved out of reflections on dreams and 'ghosts.' The soul-ghost and God have totally different sources, and monotheism may even have preceded animism, though the point of priority can never be historically settled; but in spite of this sensible assessment, Lang clearly thought that monotheism was prior, and was corrupted and degraded by later animistic ideas. The two streams of religious thought finally came together, the one through Hebrew and the other through Hellenistic sources, in Christianity." (E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965] p. 31-32.)
39. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 10-11.
40. Raymond J. DeMallie, *op. cit*., p. 28.
41. *Ibid*.
42. *Ibid*.
43. *Ibid*., p. 28-29.
44. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 10.
45. Huston Smith, *op. cit*., p. 374.
46. William Dupré, *op. cit*., p. 274-275.

47. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit.*, p. 12-13. Professor Lawrence E. Sullivan also endorsed this comment in the course of an informal conversation.
48. Wilhelm Dupré, *op. cit.*, p. 273.
49. Lawrence E. Sullivan, "Supreme Beings," *op. cit.*, Vol. 14, p. 180, emphasis added.
50. Huston Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 366-367.
51. Mircea Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 42-43, emphasis added.
52. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*, p. 12-13.
55. F.M. Bergounioux, O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 93.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
57. Cited, *ibid.*, p. 94.
58. *Ibid.*
59. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi, "Home," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 6, p. 439.
62. Whilhelm Dupré, *op. cit.*, p. 232 note 14. The following remarks of Mircea Eliade are as instructive as they are extended (*ibid.*, p. 31-32): "Indeed one of the major differences separating the people of the early cultures from people to-day is precisely the utter incapacity of the latter to live their organic life (particularly as regards sex and nutrition) as a sacrament. Psychoanalysis and historical materialism have taken as surest confirmation of their theses the important part played by sexuality and nutrition among peoples still at the ethnological stage. What they have missed, however, is how utterly different from their modern meaning are the value and even the function of eroticism and of nutrition among those peoples. For the modern they are simply physiological acts, whereas for primitive man they were sacraments, ceremonies by means of which he communicated with the *force* which stood for Life itself. As we shall see later, this force and this life are simple expressions of ultimate reality, and such elementary actions for the primitive become a rite which will assist man to approach reality, to, as it were, wedge himself into Being, by setting himself free from merely automatic actions (without sense or meaning), from change, from the profane, from nothingness.

    We shall see that, as the rite always consists in the repetition of an archetypal action performed *in illo tempore* (before "history" began) by ancestors or by gods, man is trying, by means of the hierophany, to give "being" to even his most ordinary and insignificant acts. By its repetition, the act coincides with its archetype, and time is abolished. We are witnessing, so to speak, the same act that was performed *in illo tempore*, at the dawn of the universe. Thus, by transforming all his physiological acts into ceremonies, primitive man strove to "pass beyond," to thrust himself out of time (and change) into eternity. I do not want to stress here the function fulfilled by ritual, but we must note at once that it is the normal tendency of the primitive to transform his physiological acts into rites, thus investing them with spiritual value. When he is eating or making love, he is putting himself on a plane which is not simply that of eating or sexuality. This is true both of initiatory experiences (first-fruits, first sexual act), and also of the whole of erotic or nutritional activity. One might say that here you have an

indistinct religious experience, different in form from the distinct experiences represented by the hierophany of the unusual, the extraordinary, *mana*, etc. But the part this experience plays in the life of primitive man is none the less for that, though it is, by its very nature, liable to escape the eye of the observer. This explains my earlier statement that the religious life of primitive people goes beyond the categories of *mana*, hierophanies and startling kratophanies. A real religious experience, indistinct in form, results from this effort man makes to enter the real, the sacred, by way of the most fundamental physiological acts transformed into ceremonies."

63. Arvind Sharma, *The Philosophy of Religion: A Buddhist Perspective* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 18-19.
64. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
65. F.M. Bergounioux, O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 92.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
68. Whilhelm Dupré, *op. cit.*, p. 280-281.
69. F.M. Bergounioux, O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 72.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 77. This citation is prefaced by the following remarks (*ibid.*, p. 76-77): "Among the Pygmies and the Negritos – whom Fr. Paul Schedesta studied at first hand over a long period – the Sky God exercises a strong influence over moral conduct and occurs in daily life in various hypostases, such as the Master of Animals and Thunder. These personifications are considered to be more or less identical with him. There is a rich associated cult which takes the form of the sacrifice of the first fruits of the hunt, expiatory blood rites and spontaneous or ritual prayer. It is impossible without distorting the picture to do justice in an outline to the complexity of the facts where the magic dynamics of the Pygmies and the chthonian animism of the Negritos react upon the very concept of God. One becomes aware that the two groups belong to different natural and cultural environments."
71. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit.*, p. 36-37.
72. Raymond J. DeMallie, "Lakota Belief and Ritual in the Nineteenth Century," in Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks, eds., *Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) p. 29, emphasis added.
73. Robert Stead, "Traditional Lakota Religion in Modern Life," Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 212.
74. Vine V. Deloria, Sr. "The Establishment of Christianity Among the Sioux," in Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks, eds., *op. cit.*, p. 92-93.
75. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit.*, p. 37-38.
76. Cited in John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 13-14.
77. Willard G. Oxtoby, "Holy, idea of the," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 6, pp. 421-438.
78. Charles Long, "Religion, Primitive, *Encyclopedia Britannica*" (Chicago: William Benton, 1966) Vol. 19, p. 111.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 111-112.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
81. F.M. Bergounioux, O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 69.

82. *Ibid.*
83. Wilhelm Dupré, *op. cit.*, p. 247.
84. F.M. Bergounioux, O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 80. For G. van der Leeuw there "can be no question of deism among the primitives" (*ibid.*, p. 96).
85. *Ibid.*
86. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
87. Wilhelm Dupré, *op. cit.*, p. 280.
88. Cited in Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, p. 46.
89. F.M. Bergounioux, O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 80.
90. *Ibid.*
91. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
93. This was apparently not the case in early Christianity. Celsus, who wrote circa 180 C.E., offers the following information on this point: "What makes the Christians' message dangerous, Celsus writes, is not that they believe in one God, but that they deviate from monotheism by their 'blasphemous' belief in the devil. For all the 'impious errors' the Christians commit, Celsus says, they show their greatest ignorance in making up a being opposed to God, and calling him 'devil,' or, in the Hebrew language, 'Satan.' All such ideas, Celsus declares, are nothing but human inventions, sacrilegious even to repeat: 'it is blasphemy...to say that the greatest God...has an adversary who constrains his capacity to do good.' Celsus is outraged that the Christians, who claim to worship one God, 'impiously divide the kingdom of God, creating a rebellion in it, as if there were opposing factions within the divine, including one that is hostile to God!'" (Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Random House, 1995) p. 143.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
95. *Ibid.* It may be worth adding that this dualism, however, can be a matter of degree. According to Elaine Pagels (*op. cit.*, p. 130-131): "Although many pagans had come to believe that all the powers of the universe are ultimately one, only Jews and Christians worshipped a single god and denounced all others as evil demons. Only Christians divided the supernatural world into two opposing camps, the one true god against swarms of demons; and none but Christians preached – and practiced – division on earth. By refusing to worship the gods, Christians were driving a wedge between themselves and all pagans, between divine sanctions and Roman government – a fact immediately recognized by Rusticus, Marcus's teacher in Stoicism and his personal friend, who, in his public role as prefect of Rome, personally judged and sentenced Justin and his students to death."
96. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
99. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
100. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
102. Noel Q. King, *Religions of Africa: A Pilgrimage into Traditions Religions* (New York: Harper & Row 1970) p. 16.
103. Mircea Eliade, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

CHAPTER III

1 John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 16.

2 *Ibid*. p. 15-16.

3 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 32. Mircea Eliade‘s remarks here are of some interest. He writes [trs. Rosemary Sheed, *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966) p. 56, 57-58]: “To sum up, then: the most significant thing of all is the presence of sky divinities at the most primitive levels of Australian religion, in the framework of initiation ceremonies. This initiation, as I said, assures the regeneration of the initiate at the same time as revealing to him secrets of a metaphysical nature; it feeds at once life, strength and knowledge. It shows what a close bond there is between the theophany (for in the initiation ritual the true name and nature of the god are revealed), soteriology (for the ceremony of initiation, however elementary it may be, assures the salvation of the neophyte), and metaphysics (for the revelation is given about the workings and origin of the universe, the origin of the human race and so on). But at the very heart of this secret ceremony you will find the sky god, the same divinity who originally created the universe and man, and came down to earth to establish culture and the rites of initiation.

That sky gods had, at first, this prerogative of being not only creators and omnipotent, but also all-knowing, supremely “wise,” explains why you find them changed in some religions into abstract divine figures, personified concepts used to explain the universe or express its absolute reality. Iho, the sky god of New Zealand and Tahiti, revealed only to those initiated into esoteric priestly learning, is more of a philosophical concept than a real divinity. Other sky gods – Nzambi of the Bantu peoples, for instance, Sussisinako among the Sia Indians – are asexual: a phenomenon of abstraction which marks the changing of the divinity into a metaphysical principle. Indeed, Awonawilona, among the Zuni Indians, is represented as without any personal characteristics, and may be considered equally well as feminine or as masculine (Lang called it “He-She”).

These Supreme Gods of the sky could be transformed into philosophic concepts only because the sky hierophany itself could be transformed into a metaphysical revelation; because, that is, contemplation of the sky by its very nature enabled man to know not only his own precariousness and the transcendence of the divinity, but also the sacred value of knowledge, of spiritual “force.” Gazing into the clear blue sky by day or the multitude of stars by night, nowhere could one discern more completely the divine origin and sacred value of knowledge, the omnipotence of him who *sees* and *understands*, of him who “knows” all because he is everywhere, sees everything, makes and governs all things. To the modern mind, of course, such gods, with their vague mythological outlines – Iho and Brahman and the rest – seem rather abstract, and we tend to look on them more as philosophical concepts than as divinities proper. But do not forget that to primitive man, whose invention they were, knowledge and understanding were – and still are – epiphanies of “power,” of “sacred force.” He who sees and knows all, *is* and *can do* all. Sometimes such a Supreme Being, celestial in origin, becomes the foundation of the universe, author and controller of the rhythms of nature, and tends to become amalgamated either with the principle or metaphysical substance of the universe, or with the Law, with what is eternal and universal among the phenomena of time and change – the Law which the gods themselves cannot do away with.” Also see J.B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion* (London and Redhill: Lutterworth Press, 1944) p. 69.

4. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 33.

5. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 30.
6. Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion* (London: The Epsworth Press, 1949) p. 31-32.
7. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 34.
8. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 17.
9. F.M. Bergounioux, O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz, S.J., *op. cit*., p. 92.
10. *Ibid*., p. 85-86. For more on the Coyote or Trickster see Sam D. Gill, *Native American Religions: An Introduction* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982) p. 26ff.
11. Sam D. Gill, *Beyond "The Primitive" in the Religions of Non-Literate People* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1982) p. 72.
12. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 20.
13. *Ibid*., p. 21.
14. *Ibid*., p. 21-22.
15. *Ibid*., p. 22.
16. See Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 94.
17. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., Chapter 3.
18. Quoted in Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion*, p. 32, emphasis added.
19. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 23.
20. *Ibid*., p. 23.
21. Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1954) p. 54.
22. Thomas B. Coburn, "Climbing the Mountain of God," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LXVIII: 1 (Spring 1995) p. 134. John S. Mbiti makes a curious reference to this mountain while discussing the concept of time in Africa, which according to him is not future-oriented. He adds the following footnote at this point: "The only possible exception to this statement comes from the Sonjo of Tanzania who think that the world will one day shrink to an end. This is not, however, something that dominates their life, and they go on living as though the idea did not exist. It is known that at one point in their history, this volcanic mountain (known in Massai as Oldonyo Lengai: Mountain of God) erupted and caused an 'end of the world' in their small country. This event may have been retained in the form of a myth which has been transferred to the unknown future, as a warning about possible future eruptions. See R.F. Gray *The Sonjo of Tanganyika* (1963) who, however, does not affect an explanation of this myth." (*op. cit*., p. 23 note 1).
23. *Ibid*., p. 135.
24. *Ibid*., p. 136.
25. *Ibid*.
26. *Ibid*.
27. *Ibid*., p. 137.
28. *Ibid*. The names are of people who figure in the narrative.
29. H.B. Alexander, "Philosophy (Primitive)" in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917) Vol. IX, p. 845.
30. *Ibid*., p. 845-846.

31. Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi, "Home," in Mircea Eliade, editor in chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 6, p. 439.
32. *Ibid.*
33. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
34. F.M. Bergounioux, O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 96, emphasis added.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
36. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 28-29.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
39. See Alison Dundes Renteln, *International Human Rights: Universalism Versus Relativism* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1990) p. 45-90.
40. Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion*, p. 29-30.
41. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 57-58.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
43. T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism* (Bombay: Chetana, 1971) p. 107.
44. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
45. Noel Q. King, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
46. Wilhelm Dupré, *op. cit.*, p. 235-236. One obvious philosophical difficulty: Do these visions represent different Gods or are they of the same God, even if accepted on face value?

CHAPTER IV

1. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
2. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Tr. Joseph Ward Swain, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1915).
3. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (Harper San Francisco, 1991) p. 366.
4. D.H.J. Morgan, "Sociology of Religion" in S.G.F. Brandon, General Editor, *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1970) P. 583.
5. Paul Radin, *Primitive Religion: Its Nature and Origin* (New York: Dover Publications, 1957) p. 259-260.
6. F.M. Bergounioux, O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 88.
7. D.H.J. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 584-585.
8. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. D.H.J. Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 583.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 585.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 584.

15. But what about the application of this theory to other primal religions with a history of conflict? Some scholars of primal religion might wish to address this issue.
16. *Ibid*., p. 33.
17. *Ibid*., p. 34.
18. Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New York: Bantam Books, 1957) p. 11-12, emphasis added.
19. Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (second edition) (London: Duckworth, 1986) p. 202.
20. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 35.
21. This might be a point on which Durkheim and Freud unconsciously converge, see Wilhelm Dupré, *op. cit*., p. 23 note 8.
22. Eric J. Sharpe, "Anthropology of Religion," in S.G.F. Brandon, General Editor, *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1970) p. 85.
23. For an example of the inapplicability of the "children's" thesis to the primal material à la Freud see Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 146-147.
24. Eric Fromm, *op. cit*., p. 14; John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision* (London: SCM Press, 1963) p. 27, 30, 36, 52. Also see Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 165.
25. See Wilhelm Dupré, *op. cit*., p. 305-308.
26. Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 59-61, 140.
27. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 35.
28. *Ibid*., p. 38.
29. *Ibid*.
30. *Ibid*.
31. See Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (New York: Bollingen Foundation [Pantheon Books] 1964); Manabu Waida, "Miracles," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit*., Vol. 9, p. 541; etc.
32. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 35-36.
33. *Ibid*., p. 36. The reference to astrology is interesting as recent research tends to disclose that primal cultures possessed fairly advanced knowledge of astronomy.
34. Jamake Highwater, *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) p. 39, 42 note. For an interesting formal perspective see Robin Horton, *op. cit*., Chapter 7.
35. *Ibid*. p. 28-29.
36. *Ibid*., p. 39. See Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1969) p. 27-28.
37. Vine Deloria, Jr. *God is Red* (New York: Grasset & Dunlap, 1973) p. 109.

CHAPTER V

1. John H. Hick, *The Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1990 [fourth edition]) p. 38.

2. *Ibid*., p. 39. My attention has been drawn by a student to a reference to it as religiously incompatible ideas by M. Hendrick Vroom, "Syncretism and Dialogue: A Philosophical Analysis," in Jerald Gort, Hendrik Vroom, Rein Fernhaut and Anton Wessels, eds., *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., 1989) p. 33.
3. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 39-40.
4. See David Buerge, ed., *Chief Seattle* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1992). I am indebted to Louise Johnston for this reference.
5. See Stanley Diamond's introductory essay to Paul Radin, *The Trickster* (New York: Schuken Books, 1972).
6. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, p. 41.
7. *Ibid*., p. 42.
8. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 40.
9. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 40.
10. H. B. Alexander, "Philosophy (Primitives)" in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917) Vol. IX, p. 846.
11. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford; Portsmouth New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1969) p. 199. This may be contrasted with the statement that "many societies say categorically that God did not create what is evil, nor does He do any evil whatsoever. For example, the Ila hold that God is always in the right, and 'cannot be charged with an offence, cannot be accused, cannot be questioned...He does good to all at all times'" (*ibid*).
12. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 42.
13. *Ibid*. p. 42.
14. *Ibid*., p. 209-210.
15. *Ibid*., p. 205.
16. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 43.
17. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 209-210.
18. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 208.
19. *Ibid*., p. 45.
20. Mircea Eliade, *op. cit*., p. 33.
21. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (tr. Rosemary Sheed. Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966) p. 49.
22. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 48-49.
23. *Ibid*., p. 49.
24. For comparison with Buddhist momentariness see Arvind Sharma, *op. cit*., p. 33.
25. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 50.
26. Cited by Hick, *ibid*.
27. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 50.
28. *Ibid*.
29. *Ibid*., p. 52.
30. *Ibid*., p. 55.

31. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit.*, p. 205.
32. Paul Radin, *Primitive Religion: Its Nature and Origin* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1957; first published 1937) p. 265.
33. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1969) p. 29.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 36-37.
35. Vine Deloria, Jr. *God is Red* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973) pp. 106-109.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
38. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 52-53.
39. *Ibid.*
40. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
41. *Ibid.*, note 26, in which he cites Schubert Ogden, *Faith and Freedom: Toward a Theology of Liberation* (Nashville: Abingdon. 1979) and John Cobb Jr. *Process Theology as Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982).
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
44. Griffin cited by John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 51, emphasis added.
45. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (New Delhi: Indus, 1993; first published 1927) p. 68. He goes on to say (*ibid.*): "Our civilization is quite recent when compared with the antiquity of man and the differentiation of human types. Some of the ancestors of the Great British people who are now in the vanguard of humanity were not much advanced as depicted by Julius Caesar. Who could understand the great potentialities of the savages of Britain dressed in skins at their religious worship burning men alive to appease their gods? No one acquainted with the ancestors of the Teutons would have anticipated for them their glorious contributions to music and metaphysics. Human potentiality is so great, and our knowledge of fundamental racial differences so little, that the cruel repression and extermination of races is not the part of wisdom. A little understanding of human nature and history will enable us to sympathize with the savage and the primitive, the barbarous and the backward, and help us to see that they also in their imperfect fashions are struggling towards that abiding city which shines in dazzling splendour up the steep and narrow way. Every people, every tribe however little advanced in its stage of development, represents a certain psychic type or pattern. The interests of humanity require that every type should be assisted and educated to its adequate expression and development. No race lives to itself and no race dies to itself. Besides, the backwardness of races is due to environmental conditions, physical, social and cultural. Races show considerable powers of adaptation when an external stimulus is applied to them."

CHAPTER VI

1. "We shall call [it]...primal because it came first, but alternatively we shall refer to it as tribal because its groupings were invariably small, or oral because writing was unknown to them" (Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* [Harper: San Francisco, 1991] p. 365). Might they be considered primal not merely being temporally also as ontologically closer to the source of things? This might serve as a wholesome corrective to the tendency to contrast the "primal" with the "axial" (Samuel N. Eisenstadt, "Religious

Diversity," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 12, pp. 313-318; also see Charles H. Long, "Matter and Spirit; A Reorientation," in Steven Friesen, ed., *Local Knowledge, Ancient Wisdom: Challenges in Contemporary Spirituality* [Honolulu: East-West Center, 1991] p. 14; Huston Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 366.).

2. See James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919) Vol. X, pp. 745-749 which stops with Islam; Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) Volume 12, pp. 356-362, which stops with Hinduism; John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (Fourth Edition) (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey; Prentice Hall, 1990) which stays with Christianity and generally excludes primal religions from consideration (see p. 3).

3. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

6. Gerald O'Collins, S.J. "Jesus," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 8, p. 15. Not only does not anything written by Jesus survive, the first Christian Gospel was probably not written until after 66 C.E. Could Jesus read? Biblically the answer is 'yes.' Luke 4:16-30 contains the story of Jesus reading from an Isaiah scroll before preaching on it. Historically the answer is 'maybe,' in the sense that Lukean redaction was designed to emphasize the continuity between the Gospel and the Judaic prophetic tradition. This is the only passage in the New Testament which shows Jesus explicitly reading a text and constitutes the earliest reference to a synagogue service. Could Jesus write? The answer is provided by John 8:1-11. In the famous incident related to "throwing the first stone" we read: "...but Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As he persisted with the question, he straightened up and said: .... And then he bent down and continued writing on the ground." *The New Testament of the New Jerusalem Bible* (New York: Image Books, 1986) p. 180.

   The relationship of primal religions to literacy is historically more complex. "At the turn of the century, Cree people had what was arguably one of the highest literacy rates in world. They read and wrote their own language in a syllabic script which, as noted earlier, was devised for them in the late 1830s by James Evans. The success of this script, its rapid transmission and nearly total penetration of the Cree-speaking population, took place without any of the pedagogical tools so familiar to us: there were no schools, no teachers in the specialized sense of the word, no standard writing materials, and very little printed (or written) matter to read. Moreover, older Cree people affirm that there was little time or energy to expend upon matters not pertaining to immediate survival. Yet, at the present time nearly all Cree over the age of forty-five are capable users of the syllabic script and nearly all of these state that their parents were literate as well. Most, in fact, say it was their parents who taught them to read and write.

   The Cree present us with a unique situation, one in which literacy spread in the absence of schooling. Of course, it has often been said of the system of Cree syllabic literacy that it is easy to learn, so easy that a clever Indian, on being shown the characters in the morning was able to read the Bible by their use before the sun went down the same day. The average Indian person, we are told, required no more than one week to accomplish this task although it was stated (with obvious intellectual ethnocentrism) that the script could be 'mastered by any intelligent white man in less than an hour.' These comments still do not explain the obvious motivation and will to learn that the universality of literacy in the script implies. (J.W. Berry and J.A. Bennett, *Cree Syllabic Literacy:*

Cultural Context and Psychological Consequences [Tilburg University Press, 1991] p. 12). Professor Ian Henderson, to whom I owe the references above, further notes: "In a culture of small-scale, seasonally isolated and ecologically challenged family communities, some things are really too unsettling for conversation – but a short note could be written, left, read in the right place and then consigned to flames. It is sometimes the fragility and impermanence of the written word which gives it value over permanent irretractability and violence of speech; in the family circle and with all winter to think about, all speech is taken personally." ("Life at Big Beaver," *Archways* [McGill University's Faculty of Religious Studies Newsletter, 1993] p. 5.). At the same time, one would also not wish to underrate the complexity of the relationship between textuality and orality in the non-primal religions, given the tradition of oral law in Judaism and the issues surrounding the scriptural texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism (see Donald S. Lopez, Jr. "Authority and Orality in the Mahayana," *Numen* 42:1 (January 1995) pp. 21-47; etc.).

7. See II Peter 3:8-10; I Thessalonians 5:1-3 and 4:13-18 (in context); as well as II Thessalonians 2:1-12 and Matthew 25:19 and Luke 20:9 (in context). I am indebted to Ian Henderson for these references. Also see Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 12, p. 348. The deferment of the Second Coming is repeatedly alluded to, for instance, by Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973) p. 119; etc. In general primal thinkers remain highly sceptical about the historical claims associated with the Bible (*ibid.*, Chapter 7).
8. Anson D. Shupe, Jr., *Six Perspectives on New Religions: A Case Study Approach* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1981) p. 85ff.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.
12. On Christianity as a milleranian movement see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); John G. Gaeger, *Kingdom and Community: A Social World of Early Christianity* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1975); and Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).
13. See Anson D. Shupe, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 136. The full reference of the book, whose title has been woven into the text, is as follows: Leon Festinger, *When Prophecy Fails* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956).
14. Anson D. Shupe, Jr. *op. cit.*, p. 140.
15. This was earlier proposed by me at the 1985 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in a presentation entitled: "The Implication of the Study of New Religious Movements for Methodology in the Study of Religion."
16. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
18. Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Random House, 1995).
19. See Constance Classen, "Literacy as Anticulture: The Andean Experience of the Written Word," *History of Religions* 30:4 (May 1991) pp. 404-421. Although this article deals with archaic cultures, its conclusions apply, *pari passu*, to the primal. One can only wonder how "the negative experience of writing" (p. 413) by a people might have coloured their attitude toward "scripture," specially Christian scripture.
20. Vine Deloria, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 82: "A religion defined according to temporal considerations is placed continually on the defensive in maintaining its control over

historical events. If, like the Hebrews of the Old testament, political, economic, and cultural events can be interpreted as religious events, the religious time and the secular time can be made to appear to coincide. If, however, the separation becomes more or less permanent, as in Christianity and Western concepts of history, then religion becomes a function of political interpretations as in the Manifest Destiny theories of American history, or it becomes secularized as an economic determinism as in Communist theories of history. Either way the religion soon becomes helpless to intervene in the events of real life, except in a peripheral and oblique manner."; etc.

21. Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks, eds. *Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987) pp. 57-65 etc. "A Zuni Indian once asked an ethnologist who was meticulously noting each word of a traditional story 'When I tell these stories, do you see it, or do you just write it down?'" (Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 68; also see p. 112ff).
22. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1969) p. 60ff.
23. D. M. Dooling, ed., *The Sons of the Wind* (Harper San Francisco, 1984).
24. Lawrence E. Sullivan, "Dissonant Human Histories and the Vulnerability of Understanding," in Steven Friesen, ed. *op. cit*., p. 26-27.
25. Gerardo Reichel-Dolmotoff, *San Agustin: A Culture of Columbia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975) Vol. I, p. 108, emphasis added.
26. *Ibid*., p. 109.
27. *Ibid*., p. 113.
28. Johannes Deninger, "Revelation," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit*., Vol. 12, p. 356.
29. Donald L. Philippi, tr., *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968) p. 49.
30. *Ibid*., p. 53.
31. I owe this suggestion to Victor Hori, as also the references from the *Kojiki*.
32. Donald L. Phillipi, *op. cit*., p. 57.
33. *Ibid*., p. 87.
34. *Ibid*., p. 68.
35. Ronald M. Berndt, *Australian Aboriginal Religion* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974) p. 8.
36. *Ibid*., p. 18.
37. Elaine A. Jahner, "Lakota Genesis: The Oral Tradition," in Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks, eds. *Sioux Indian Religion*, *op. cit*., p. 55. Also see the speech of "Young Chief, A Cayuse, who refused to sign the Treaty of Walla Walla because, he felt, the rest of creation was not represented in the transaction." Most of this rest of creation is described in terms of the earth in his speech cited by Vine Deloria, Jr. (*op. cit*., p. 95): "I wonder if the ground has anything to say? I wonder if the ground is listening to what is said? I wonder if the ground would come alive and what is on it? Though I hear what the ground says. The ground says, It is the Great Spirit that placed me here. The Great Spirit appointed the roots to feed the Indians on. The water says the same thing, The Great Spirit directs me, Feed the Indians well. The grass says the same thing, Feed the Indians well. The ground, water and grass say, the Great Spirit has given us our names. We have these names and hold these names. The ground says, The Great Spirit placed me here to produce all that grows on me, trees and fruit. The same way the ground says, It was from me man was made. The Great Spirit, in placing me on earth, desired them to take good care of the ground and to do each other no harm."

38. See Huston Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 371.
39. Robert Ernest Hume, tr., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads* (second edition) (London: Oxford University Press, 1931) p. 247-248.
40. The difference, however, should not be glossed over. Consider, for instance, the way the concept of *axis mundi* ramifies differently. As Hertmut Scharfe points out: "Irwin argues, following Mircea Eliade, that the existence of more than one center of the earth is non-contradictory, since a center is wherever one wants it to be. He misses the important distiction between the early tribal or regional claims to possess or live at the center of the earth and the later rationalizations when the larger ethnic entity found itself with more than one acclaimed center. Nobody was concerned at all with the similar claims of foreigners; if pressed for an explanation people would have answered that 'this is our tradition'" (*The State in Indian Tradition* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989] p. 13 note 67).
41. Ewert Cousins, "Three Symbols for the Second Axial Period," in Steven Friesen, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 23.
42. The linear concept of time associated with Shinto also needs to be taken into account here, see Kitabatake Chikafusa (thirteenth century) as cited by Paul S. Maglapus "Philippine Culture and Modernization" in Robert N. Bellah, ed. *Religion and Progress in Modern Asia* (Ne York: The Free Press, 1965) p. 40.
43. Eliot Deutsch and J.A.B. van Buitenin, *A Source Book of Advaita Vedānta* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1971) p. 5. In the traditional Hindu view the sages "saw" the hymns revealed to them. This provides an enticing parallel with the "vision quest," and invites the consideration of vision as a mode of revelation; see *Black Elk, The Sacred Pipe* (Norman, Okla.: Universtiy of Oklahoma Press, 1971); etc.
44. Winston L. King, "Religion" in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 12, p. 282.
45. J. Donald Hughes, as cited in Jamake Highwater, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 128. They forgot what the West came looking for was land, not earth. For American Indian attitudes to earth see T.C. McLuhan, *Touch the Earth* (New York: Promontory Press, 1971); etc.
47. John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
48. Cited in Jamake Highwater, *op. cit.*, p. 82. Also see Huston Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 365-366.
49. F.M. Bergounioux, O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz, S.J., *Prehistoric and Primitive Religion* (London: Burns and Oates. 1965) p. 78-79.
50. Winston L. King, "Religion," in Mircea Eliade. Editor in Chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 12, p. 282.
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Ibid.*, p. 283.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 282.
54. Geaffrey Parrinder, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
55. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books Inc., 1969) p. 5.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
57. Many Hindu scholars note these two aspects of Christianity but do not make the connection he forges, see S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (New Delhi: Indus, 1993: first published 1927) p. 37, 43-44.

58. This relationship between monotheism and revelation is not one of necessity in Hindu thought.
59. Vine Deloria, Jr. *God is Red* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973) p. 80.
60. *Ibid*.
61. *Ibid*.
62. See Charles Long, "Religion, Primitive," in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: William Benton, 1966) Vol. 19, p. 110-111.
63. F.M. Bergounioux, O.F.M. and Joseph Goetz S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 86. This statement is open to question.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
66. *Ibid*.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
68. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 6.
69. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (Rosemary Sheed tr.: Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966) p. 11.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 29-30.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 31, note 1. Interestingly the discussion by Wilhelm Dupré (*Religion in Primitive Cultures: A Study in Ethnophilosophy* [The Hague: Mouton, 1975] pp. 313-314) oscillates between proto-revelation and the claim that "consciousness is in its very essence revelatory" (p. 314).
74. Mircea Eliade and Lawrence E. Sullivan, "Hierophany" in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *op. cit.*, Vol. 6, p. 316.
75. The discovery of new scriptural texts may find a parallel in the discovery of new cave paintings?; See *Time*, February 13, 1995, p. 40-47; June 18, 1995, p. 37.
76. Micea Eliade and Lawrence E. Sullivan, *op. cit*., p. 315.
77. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture: A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
78. This presentation has benefited greatly from discussions with Professor Kathleen M. Dugan; the responsibility for views expressed remains mine.

CHAPTER VII

1. John H. Hick, *op. cit*. p. 56.
2. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1964; trans. Joseph Ward Swain) p. 327.
3. *Ibid*. p. 360. Emphasis added.
4. Cited in John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 54.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Emile Durkheim, *op. cit*., p. 354.
7. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 59.

8. Cited, *ibid*., p. 59.
9. *Ibid*., p. 60.
10 *Ibid*., p. 60.
11. *Ibid*., p. 60.
12. Wilhelm Dupré, *op. cit*., p. 139.
13. Cited in John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 61.
14. *Ibid*.
15. Cited in *ibid*.
16. *Ibid*.
17. *Ibid*., p. 61-62: "...such verification is only for [subjective] certitude, not a proving of [objective] certainty as to external reality. The fruitfulness of a belief or of faith for the moral and religious life is one thing. and the reality or existence of what is ideated and assumed is another. There are instances in which a belief that is not true, in the sense of corresponding with fact, may inspire one with lofty ideals and stimulate one to strive to be a more worthy person."
18. Charles Long, "Religion, Primitive," *op. cit*., p. 110.
19. See Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge, U.K., and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
20. See John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 62-64.
21. Wilhelm Dupré, *op. cit*., p. 298-299. He goes on to say: "In summary, we can say that religion is not a construction of the human mind, although man's constructive power is obvious throughout the course of history. Nor is religion the result of impersonal processes, although such factors as environment, economy and social structure never cease to influence its genesis. Primitive religion leads us into the original condition of mankind and to its multi-relational modes of appearance. Man is born as a religious being whose existential truth is basically identical with that of his religion, and vice versa. That is the indication given by primitive cultures."
22. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 64. The theological consideration why this might be so are explained by John Hick as follows (*ibid*., p. 64-65): "If it is God's intention to confront us with God's presence, as personal will and purpose, why has this not been done in an unambiguous manner, by some overwhelming manifestation of divine power and glory?

    The answer that is generally given runs parallel to one of the considerations that occurred in connection with the problem of evil. If one is to have the freedom necessary for a relationship of love and trust, this freedom must extend to the basic and all-important matter of one's consciousness of god. God (as conceived in the Judaic-Christian tradition) is such that to be aware of God is, in important respects, unlike being aware of a finite person. The existence of a fellow human being can be a matter of indifference to us. The obvious exception is that consciousness of another which is love. The peculiarly self-involving awareness of love thus bears a certain analogy to our awareness of God. In love, the existence of the beloved, far from being a matter of indifference, affects one's whole being. God, the object of the religious consciousness, is such that it is impossible for a finite creature to be aware of God and yet remain unaffected by this awareness. God, according to the Judaic-Christian tradition, is the source and ground of our being. It is by God's will that we exist. God's purpose for us is so indelibly written into our nature that the fulfillment of this purpose is the basic condition of our own personal self-fulfillment and happiness. We are thus totally

dependent upon God as the giver not only of our existence but also of our highest good. To become conscious of God is to see oneself as a created, dependent creature receiving life and well-being from a higher source. In relation to this higher Being, self-disclosed to us as holy love, the only appropriate attitude is one of grateful worship and obedience. Thus, the process of becoming aware of God, if it is not to destroy the frail autonomy of the human personality, must involve the individual's own freely responding insight and assent. Therefore, it is said, God does not become known to us as a reality of the same order as ourselves, for then the finite being would be swallowed by the infinite Being. Instead, God has created space-time as a sphere in which we may exist in relative independence, as spatiotemporal creatures. Within this sphere God is self-discovered in ways that allow us the fateful freedom to recognize or fail to recognize God's presence. Divine activity always leaves room for that uncompelled response that theology calls faith. It is this element in the awareness of God that preserves our reality. Faith is this the correlate of freedom: faith is related to cognition as free will to conation. As one of the early Church Fathers wrote, 'And not merely in works, but also in faith, has God preserved the will of man free and under his own control.'"

23. *Ibid*. p. 65.
24. *Ibid*., p. 65-66.
25. *Ibid*., p. 66.
26. *Ibid*., p. 66-67.
27. Pratima Bowes, *The Hindu Religious Tradition: A Philosophical Approach* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977) p. 275.
28. Emile Durkheim, *op. cit*., p. 360-361: "Now the Australian does not proceed otherwise when he attributes the failure of the Intichiuma to some sorcery, or the abundance of a premature crop to a mystic Intichiuma celebrated in the beyond. He has all the more reason for not doubting his rite on the belief in a contrary fact, since its value is, or seems to be, established by a larger number of harmonizing facts. In the first place, the moral efficacy of the ceremony is real and is felt directly by all who participate in it, whose importance no contradictory experience can diminish. Also, the physical efficacy itself is not unable to find an at least apparent confirmation in the data of objective observation. As a matter of fact, the totemic species normally does reproduce regularly; so in the great majority of cases, everything happens just as if the ritual gestures really did produce the effects expected of them. Failures are the exception. As the rites, and especially those which are periodical, demand nothing more of nature than that it follow its ordinary course, it is not surprising that it should generally have the air of obeying them. So if the believer shows himself indocile to certain lessons of experience, he does so because of other experiences which seem more demonstrative. The scholar does not do otherwise; only he introduces more method."
29. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 67.
30. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, p. 39.
31. *Ibid*., p. 31-33: "The Mende of Sierra Leone say that God was formerly nearer to men than he is now and he gave them whatever they needed. But they troubled him so often that he decided to make a dwelling place far away. He went off while men were asleep and when they woke up they saw him spread out in all directions in the sky. A commoner story, told in the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Dahomey and Nigeria, at least says that God was formerly so near to men that they grew over-familiar with him. Children wiped their hands on the sky after eating and women tore pieces off it to put in the soup. Women knocked against the sky when they were pounding grain, and finally

one woman hit it so hard with her pestle that the sky moved away in anger to its present distance.

There is virtual identification of God with the sky in these stories, though in other myths it is God himself who moves away. It is remarkable that almost identical myths are told in eastern Africa. The Nuba of the Sudan say that the sky one pressed down so low that women could not lift their spoons high enough to stir the porridge without getting their hands burnt on the pots. One day a woman forced her spoon right through the sky and it went off in anger. Another version says that people used to eat pieces of the clouds till they went away. The Dinka also say that the sky was low and was hit by a woman pounding extra grain in her mortar. But another Dinka story says that man was in heaven at that time, kept in by a wall, but when he ate part of it God pushed him down to earth. Women are often blamed in these myths for the disruption of primeval bliss, perhaps because the stories were invented by men.

A common theme is that a rope, ladder or spider's web used to join earth and heaven. The Dinka say that men used to climb up it to God, but when the women had offended him God sent a blue bird to cut the rope. The Nuer say that men used to climb the rope after death and they became young again, but a hyena and a weaver bird cut the rope and since then men have not been rejuvenated.

Many people of central and southern Africa say that God (Mulungu) lived on earth at first, but men began to kill his servants and set fire to the bush, and so God retired to heaven on one of those giant spider's webs that seem to hang from the sky in morning mists. In Burundi, however, it is said that having made good children God created a cripple, and its parents were so angry that they tried to kill God and he went away, The Lozi (Barotse) of Zambia say that when God lived on earth there was a man called Kamonu who was very clever. He imitated God in making iron and forged a spear with which he killed an antelope. God rebuked him for slaying his brother and drove him out. Kamonu pleaded to be allowed back, but later he killed a buffalo and other animals. Then God sent misfortune, so that Kamonu's own child died, and God himself retired. He went first with his family to an island in a river, but Kamonu followed them, and they went up a high mountain, Kamonu still came on and God asked his diviner, the wagtail, where to go next. He was told to ask the spider, which spun a thread so that God and his family went up to heaven, and the spider's eyes were put out so that it could not follow them, Kamonu piled up trees in a vain attempt to climb up to the sky, but they all fell down.

A Pygmy myth, perhaps under the influence of a Negro story, says that God (Mugasa) used to live on earth with his family, two boys and a girl. But they did not see him for he lived in a big house where he worked at a smithy. The girl brought firewood and water to God every day and left them outside the house, but at last she was curious to see God and hid herself to watch. She saw a big arm, covered with metal bracelets, come out and take the pot of water. But God saw the girl, and being angry at her disobedience he went off, but he left behind weapons and tools for his children. The girl married her brothers but her first child died, and so death came to the world.

These myths explain creation and the separation of man and God. They look back to a golden age when God lived among men and there was no pain or death. Some writers consider that they depict an original fall of man from a state of innocence, as in the Bible, but this seems to be forcing a theological explanation into stories that are more concerned to explain the distance of the sky and God from man, rather than the expulsion of man from paradise. Is the Eden story a more charming version of God's withdrawal in the primal stories?"

CHATPER VIII

1. John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (fourth edition) (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1990) p. 68-69.
2. *Ibid*., p. 69.
3. *Ibid*.
4. *Ibid*.
5. *Ibid*,. p. 69. Another objection to such comprehensive scepticism may be mentioned here (*ibid*., p. 70): "It has also been argued that when doubt becomes universal in its scope, it becomes meaningless. To doubt whether some particular perceived object is real is to doubt whether it is as real as the other sensible objects that we experience. 'Is that chair really there?' means 'Is it there in the way in which the table and the other chairs are there?' But what does it mean to doubt whether there is really anything whatever there? Such 'doubt' is meaningless. For if nothing is real, there is no longer any sense in which anything can be said to be unreal."
6. Jamake Highwater, *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981) p. 64.
7. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1969) p. 25.
8. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 70. It should be added that "To deny the validity of universal skepticism of the senses is not, however, to deny that there are illusions and hallucinations, or that there are many, and perhaps even inexhaustible, philosophical problems connected with sense perception. It is one thing to know that a number of sense reports are true and another thing to arrive at their correct philosophical analysis." (*ibid*.).
9. *Ibid*., p. 70-71. The point is elaborated as follows: "They thought of God as an experienced reality rather than as an inferred entity. The biblical writers were (sometimes, though doubtless not at all times) as vividly conscious of being in God's presence as they were of living in a material environment. It is impossible to read their writings with any degree of sensitivity without realizing that to these people God was not a proposition completing a syllogism, or an abstract idea accepted by the mind, but the reality that gave meaning to their lives. Their pages resound and vibrate with the sense of God's presence as a building might resound and vibrate from the tread of some great being walking through it. It would be as sensible for husbands or wives to desire philosophical proof of the existence of their family members (who contribute so much to the meaning of their lives) as for persons of faith to seek proof of the existence of God, within whose purpose they are conscious that they live and move and have their being." (*ibid*., p. 71).
10. *Ibid*., p. 71.
11. Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 26-27.
12. *Ibid*., p. 40.
13. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 72.
14. *Ibid*., p. 74.
15. *Ibid*., p. 72-73.
16. *Ibid*., p. 73.
17. *Ibid*., p. 74.
18. *Ibid*.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
21. Cited in John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 76-77.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, p. 74-80.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 74-80.
28. S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959) p. 327.
29. Cited in John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 79.
30. Cited by Abraham Maslow in Walter Capps, *Ways of Understanding Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972) p. 387 note 1.

CHAPTER IX

1. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit.*, Chapter 3.
2. H. Odera Oruka, "John Mbiti's Contribution to African Philosophy," in Jacob K. Olupona and Sulayman S. Nyang, eds., *Religious Plurality in African: Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti* (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993) p. 392.
3. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit.*, p. 22-23.
4. Sam D. Gill, *Native American Religions: An Introduction* (Belmont: California, 1982) p. 129.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
6. Jamake Highwater, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Cited by Jamake Highwater, *op. cit.*, p. 73. Jamake Highwater adds (*ibid.*): "But to a Wintu Indian it is equally natural to speak of deer or salmon without any distinction in regard to number. *To a member of this tribe a flock or a herd is a singular whole; it is not a collection of individual elements.* To Western people the distinction of number is so essential to their thinking that they do not mention an object without also indicating whether it is singular or plural; and if they refer to it in the present tense, the verb always reflects the number."
9. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
10. Cited, *ibid.*, p. 73-74.
11. Cited, *ibid.*, p. 74.
12. See John B. Carroll, ed,. *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1956). Sam D. Gill comments thus on the impact of his findings: "Benjamin Lee Whorf's studies of Hopi language created a still reverberating series of shock waves. Whorf found that Hopi language does not have tense in the ordinary sense of having verb forms which distinguish past, present, and future. This observation – linked with a hypothesis of linguistic determinism proposed by Whorf and Edward Sapir, which proclaimed that language determines one's view of

reality – suggested that the Hopi must experience time in ways strangely different from us." (*Beyond 'The Primitive': The Religions of Nonliterate Peoples* [Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1982] p. 16).

13. Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 104.
14. Cited, *ibid*., p. 104.
15. Cited, *ibid*., p. 105.
16. *Ibid*., p. 108.
17. *Ibid*. This resonates with aspects of Buddhist thought.
18. Sam Gill, *op. cit*., p. 18.
19. Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 108-109.
20. Sam D. Gill, *op. cit*., p. 18-19.
21. Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 105 footnote.
22. Sam D. Gill, *op. cit*., p. 18, emphasis added.
23. *Ibid*. This bears a similarity of the thoughts expressed in the Brāhmaṇa texts of the Vedas.
24. Sam D. Gill, *op. cit*., p. 17.
25. *Ibid*.
26. Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Random House, 1995) p. 167.
27. Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (New york: Harper & Brothers, 1959) p. 40.
28. *Ibid*., p. 152.
29. Sam D. Gill, *op. cit*., p.
30. *Ibid*.
31. *Ibid*.
32. *Ibid*., p. 19.

CHAPTER X

1. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1969) p. 25.
2. John H. Hick, *The Philosophy of Religion* (fourth edition) (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990) p. 82-83.
3. *Ibid*.
4. *Ibid*.
5. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit*., p. 21.
6. Sam D. Gill, *Beyond "The Primitive": The Religions of Non-Literate Peoples* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1982) p. 16.
7. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 83.
8. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 83.
9. *Ibid*.
10. Noel Q. King, *Religions of Africa: A Pilgrimage Into Traditional Religions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970) p. 7.
11. Cited in John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 85.

12. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 85.
13. *Ibid*.
14. *Ibid*.
15. Cited, *ibid*., p. 86.
16. *Ibid*., p. 86-87.
17. Baldwin Spencer and F.J. Gillen, *The Arunta: A Study of a Stone Age People* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1927).
18. Sam Gill, *Beyond the Primitive: The Religions of Nonliterate Peoples*, p. 19.
19. *Ibid*., p. 20-21.
20. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit*., p. 29-30.
21. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950) p. 132.
22. John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision* (London: SCM Press, 1963) p. 38-41.
23. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 88.
24. *Ibid*.
25. *Ibid*.
26. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (tr. Rosemary Sheed, Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966) p. 29-30.
27. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 89.
28. *Ibid*.
29. Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967) p. 12, note 1.
30. Jamake Highwater, *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) p. 57-58.
31. Cited by John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 89-90.
32. *Ibid*., p. 90.
33. Cited, *ibid*., p. 90.
34. Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 13.
35. *Ibid*., p. 55.
36. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 90-91.
37. Stanley Diamond, "Introductory Essay, to Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Schucken Books, 1972) p. xxi-xxii.
38. Cited, John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 91.
39. Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 67.
40. *Ibid*., p. 189.
41. Cited by Jamake Highwater, *ibid*., p. 188-189.
42. Cited in John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 94.
43. *Ibid*., p. 94.
44. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 94.
45. Geoffrey Parrinder, op, cit., p. 35, emphasis added. Another myth is more graphic (*ibid*.): "A Luyia myth says that the first man and woman tried to have union in several ways

but did not know how, until the man watched his wife climbing into a granary and saw the way. She refused the union at first and suffered great pain, but eventually she bore a son and daughter."

46. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
47. John H, Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 97.
48. Cited by John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 98-99.
49. Cited in John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
50. One must distinguish here between D.Z. Phillips' *own* attempts to do so, which some have judged unsatisfactory (see Brian R. Clark, "D.Z. Phillips, Wittgenstein and Religion," *Religious Studies* 31: 1 [March 1995] p. 119).
51. Jamake Highwater, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER XI

1. John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (fourth edition) (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1990) p. 100.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
5. Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and Science* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 181.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 183-184.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. As cited in John H. Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 101-102.
12. *Ibid.* p. 102.
13. William Dupré, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
14. Jamake Highwater, *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) p. 176. He goes on to say (*ibid.*, p. 176-177): "In the autobiography of a Hopi Indian, *Sun Chief* (Simmons), the initiation is described in detail: 'When the kachinas entered the kiva without masks, I had a great surprise. They were not spirits, but human beings. I recognized nearly every one of them and felt very unhappy, because I had been told all my life that the kachinas were gods. I was especially shocked and angry when I saw all my uncles, father, and clan brothers dancing as kachinas.'

    It is easy to interpret these events as devastating from the Western viewpoint, but it seems to me that the Indian vantage suggests a heightening of spirituality rather than the opposite, Once the shock has turned into recognition the initiate has acquired a mature and marvelous grasp of reality. It is perhaps a bit similar to our experience in art. When we are deeply moved by a painting we believe in its genuineness as a physical fact. But when we move closer to it and realize that it is composed of canvas and paint its reality

is not destroyed for us – because the reality of art does not depend upon substantiality. The real power of both kachinas and paintings comes from their *ability to transform one thing into another, to contain many realities rather than representing a single set of statistical elements that appear real to us*."

15. In John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 102-103.
16. *Ibid*., p. 102.
17. Narrated by Stanley Diamond in Paul Radin, *The Trickster* (New York: Schucken Books, 1972) p. xi-xii. Also cited earlier in the Introduction.
18. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 104-105.
19. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 103-104.
20. Robin Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 181.
21. *Ibid*. p. 181. See John H. Hick, p. 70 for use of the paradigm case argument.
22. *Ibid*.
23. Robin Horton, *op. cit*., p. 182, emphasis added.
24. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 79.
25. *Ibid*., emphasis added.
26. See Noel Q. King, *Religions of Africa* (New York, Evanston and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970) p. 15-24.
27. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 105.
28. Robin Horton, *op, cit*., p. 179.
29. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 106.
30. *Ibid*.
31. *Ibid*.
32. Robin Horton, *op. cit*., p. 184.
33. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions*, p. 42.
34. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 107.
35. *Ibid*.
36. *Ibid*.
37. *Ibid*., p. 107-108.
38. Robin Horton, *op. cit*., p. 177ff.
39. *Ibid*. p. 177-178.
40. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 106.

CHAPTER XII

1. John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (fourth edition) (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990) p. 109-110.
2. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (Harper San Francisco, 1991) p. 365.
3. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 110.
4. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964; tr. Joseph Ward Swain) p. 3.

5. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A New Approach to the Religious Traditions of Mankind* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).
6. Cited, John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 111.
7. *Ibid*., p. 112.
8. *Ibid*. p. 112.
9. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1981)
10. Wilhelm Dupré, *op. cit*., p. 105.
11. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (second edition) (Oxford, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1969) p. 5, emphasis added.
12. *Ibid*., p. 2. This, and the following passage, has also been cited earlier.
13. *Ibid*. p. 2.
14. *Ibid*. p. 3.
15. *Ibid*., p. 4.
16. John H. Hick seems to take an evolutionary view of the preceding period, which some may wish to contend (*op. cit*., p. 112-113): "To see the historical inevitability of the plurality of religions in the past and its noninevitability in the future, we must note the broad course that has been taken by the religious life of humanity. Humanity has been described as a naturally religious animal, displaying an innate tendency to experience the environment as being religiously as well as naturally significant and to feel required to live in it as such. This tendency is universally expressed in the cultures of early peoples with their belief in sacred objects, endowed with mana, and in a multitude of spirits needing to be carefully propitiated. The divine reality is here apprehended as a plurality of quasi-animal forces. The next stage seems to have come with the coalescence of tribes into larger groups. The tribal gods were then ranked in hierarchies (some being lost by amalgamation in the process) dominated, in the Middle East, by great national gods such as the Sumerian Ishtar, Amon of Thebes, Jahweh of Israel, Marduk of Babylon, the Greek Zeus, and in India by the Vedic high gods such as Dyaus (the sky god), Varuna (god of heaven), and Agni (the fire god). The world of such national and nature gods, often martial and cruel and sometimes requiring human sacrifices, reflected the state of humanity's awareness of the divine at the dawn of documentary history, some three thousand years ago.

    So far, the whole development can be described as the growth of natural religion. That is to say, primal spirit worship expressing fear of the unknown forces of nature, and late the worship of regional deities – depicting either aspect of nature (sun, sky, etc.) or the collective personality of a nation – represent the extent of humanity's religious life prior to any special intrusions of divine revelation or illumination.

    But sometime after 1000 B.C.E. a golden age of religious creativity, named by Jaspers the Axial Period, dawned. This consisted of a series of revelatory experiences occurring in different parts of the world that deepened and purified people's conception of the divine reality upon the human spirit."
17. *Ibid*., p. 113, emphasis added.
18. Cited, *ibid*., p. 113. A primal perspective on this axial transformation is presented by Wilhelm Dupré (*op. cit*., pp. 331-332): "When taken over by the archaic high cultures, the neolithic response misses somehow the full impact of the logic implicit in the idea of universality. Since tribal orientation continues, the new historical thrust does not cut the

cord that connects it with the neolithicum. It creates its own paradox and develops within it. In principle universality is not the measure of the tribal, but the tribal is the measurement of the universal. Though initiated by the idea of universality the movement of the archaic high cultures bears its own end within its beginning. In essence it remains a tribal affair.

If we accept this idea of tribal universalism the history of the high cultures begins to fall int a pattern. Although the why of tribal universalism, while being a cultural reality and becoming an ethical issue of man's future, retracts itself into the indefinite depth of anthropological and historical genesis, it nevertheless gains meaning as a referential frame. Tribal universalism becomes significant as the description of patterns that characterize and polarize the how of cultural realization within the practical and ideological genesis of documented history. As a basically paradoxical synthesis it prepares us to expect all sorts of cultural contradictions. Moreover, since the true dimensions of a contradictory beginning can be said to become visible when the initial thrust reaches its very perfection, the idea of tribal universalism not only permits us to ask for the end of this movement but evaluates it also as a turning point in culture history.

If we reopen at this point both the question about stability and the symbolic value of the present age, we first can say that stability has been one of the foremost tasks in the neolithic metamorphosis. At this juncture of cultural existence mankind came up with a world construction appropriate to the tribe. This tribal world construction was, however, not simply discontinued in the succeeding development of archaic high cultures. One the contrary, it remained effective and became part of the paradox of tribal universalism. In the second place we therefore should ask ourselves whether the tribal world construction has been replaced since then? Because of the epochal significance of tribal universalism this question cannot be eliminated from a serious attempt at bringing culture history into a perspective. Moreover, if it should turn out that mankind has not yet experienced the end of tribal universalism, then it goes without saying that the question about crisis and stability today cannot be separated from that about this end.

Assessing the present situation in the light of these deliberations, two observations receive conclusive status. On the one hand we can point to many instances in the history of civilization that run counter to the tribal world construction. Yet, at the same time we have to add that no final success has been granted to these efforts. Since this result is in line with the idea of tribal universalism, we may assume that the thrust of this paradox has not yet lost its vigor. On the other hand we can point to the potential and factual destructiveness of modern civilization. If we understand this development as a kind of culmination of universalism in the name of and according to the tribe, it is fair to say that the paradoxical thrust that gave birth to archaic high cultures is reaching its end. Consequently, the crisis in question is not the one of the restorational type, but it is an epochal crisis in a radical sense. In either case we are led to the neolithicum both as the key to our age, its crisis, and stability problems, and as the historical place where we have to search for the forces that brought us into being."

19. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 116. Hick surveys some attempts to meet this paradox but concludes (*ibid.*, p. 117): "Thus it seems that if the tension at the heart of the traditional Christian attitude to non-Christian faiths is to be resolved, Christian thinkers must give even more radical attention to the problem than they have as yet done. It is, however, not within the scope of this book to suggest a plan for the reconstruction of Christian or other religious doctrines."

21. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 4.
22. *Ibid*., p. 3-4.
23. *Ibid*., p. 118. He goes on to say: "Thus the Jahweh of the Hebrew Scriptures exists in interaction with the Jewish people. He is a part of their history and they are a part of his; he cannot be abstracted from this particular concrete historical nexus. On the other hand, Krishna is a quite different divine figure, existing in relation to a different faith-community with its own different and distinctive religious ethos. Given the basic hypothesis of the reality of the Divine, we may say that Jahweh and Krishna (and likewise, Shiva, and Allah, and the Father of Jesus Christ) are different *personae* in terms of which the divine Reality in experienced and thought within different streams of religious life. These different *personae* are thus partly projections of the divine Reality into human consciousness, and partly projections of the human consciousness itself as it has been formed by particular historical cultures. From the human end they are our different images of God; from the divine end they are God's *personae* in relation to the different human histories of faith" (*ibid*., p. 118-119).
24. Cited in Huston Smith, *op. cit*., p. 378.
25. Jamake Highwater, *The Primal Mind: Vision and Reality in Indian America* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) p. 65.

CHAPTER XIII

1. According to some it is not only prevalent but fundamental, see Paul Radin, *Primitive Religion: Its Nature and Origin* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1957; first published 1937) p. 268.
2. John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (fourth edition) (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990) p. 120.
3. See E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) pp. 24-26.
4. Claude Rivière, "Soul: Concepts in Primitive Religions," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: The Macmillan Press, 1987) Vol. 13, p. 426.
5. *Ibid*., p. 426-427.
6. Cited by John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 121.
7. *Ibid*., p. 429.
8. *Ibid*.
9. *Ibid*., p. 430.
10. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 121: "Plato argues that although the body belongs to the sensible world and shares its changing and impermanent nature, the intellect is related to the unchanging realities of which we are aware when we think not of particular good things but of Goodness itself, not of specific just acts but of Justice itself, and of the other 'universals' or eternal Ideas by participation in which physical things and events have their own specific characteristics. Being related to this higher and abiding realm rather than to the evanescent world of sense, the soul is immortal. Hence, one who devotes one's life to the contemplation of eternal realities rather than to the gratification of the fleeting desires of the body will find at death that whereas the body turns to dust, one's soul gravitates to the realm of the unchanging, there to live forever. Plato painted

an awe-inspiring picture, of haunting beauty and persuasiveness, which has moved and elevated the minds of men and women in many different centuries and lands. Nevertheless, it is not today (as it was during the first centuries of the Christian era) the common philosophy of the West; and a demonstration of immortality which presupposes Plato's metaphysical system cannot claim to constitute a proof for a twentieth-century person."

11. Claude Rivière, *op. cit*., p. 426, 427.
12. *Ibid*., p. 122.
13. *Ibid*.
14. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 123.
15. *Ibid*., p. 123.
16. *Ibid*., p. 123-124.
17. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 123.
18. *Ibid*., p. 124.
19. *Ibid*.
20. *Ibid*., p. 94.
21. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa's Three Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1969) p. 38.
22. *Ibid*.
23. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 96-97.
24. A.E. Crawley, "Life and Death: Primitive," in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915) Vol. VIII, p. 12.
25. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 122.
26. A.E. Crawley, *op. cit*., Vol. VIII, p. 12.
27. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit*., p. 28.
28. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 158.
29. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., pp. 125-129.
30. *Ibid*., p. 129-129.
31. For a classic study see Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964).
32. Mircea Eliade, "Shamanism: An Overview," in Mircea Eliade, Editor in Chief, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) Volume 13, p. 202.
33. *Ibid*., p. 203-204. It is to this ability of the soul to leave the body with which a shaman's extraordinary abilities are to be ultimately connected. (*ibid*., p. 205): "Because of his ability to leave his body with impunity, the shaman can, if he so wishes, act in the manner of a spirit: he flies through the air, he becomes invisible, he perceives things at great distances; he mounts to Heaven or descends to Hell, sees the souls of the dead and can capture them, and is impervious to fire. The exhibition of certain faqir-like accomplishments during ritual séances, especially the so-called fire tricks, is intended to convince spectators that the shaman has assimilated the mode of being of spirits. The ability to turn into an animal, to kill at a distance, and to foretell the future are also among the powers of spirits; by exhibiting such powers, the shaman proclaims that he shares in the spirits' condition."

34. *Ibid*., p. 205-206.
35. See Omar Call Stewart, *Peyote Religion: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); etc.
36. Huston Smith, “Do Drugs Have Religious Import,” Journal *of Philosophy* LXI:18:1 (October 1984).
37. Since the pioneering work of Walter Houston Clark, *Chemical Ecstasy* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1969)
38. Harvey Cox, *Turning East* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1977) p. 46-48.

CHATER XIV

1. John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (fourth edition) (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990) p. 131.
2. *Ibid*., p. 132.
3. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa’s Three Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1969) p. 86.
4. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (second edition) (Oxford; Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1969) p. 159.
5. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Africa’s Three Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1969) p. 84.
6. *Ibid*.
7. *Ibid*., p. 84-85.
8. The word claimed is important. As John H. Hick points out: “In its more popular form in both East and West the doctrine of reincarnation holds that the conscious character-gearing and (in principle) memory-bearing self transmigrates from body to body. As we read in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, ‘Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on others that are new, even so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out bodies and takes on others that are new’ (2, 13). On this conception it is possible to say that I – the ‘I’ who am now conscious and who am now writing these words – have lived before and will live again, in other bodies. It must accordingly be in principle possible for me, in my present body, to remember my past lives, even though in fact the traumas of death and birth generally erase these memories, repressing them to a deep and normally inaccessible level of the unconscious. Occasionally, however, ordinary people do for some reason seem to remember fragments of a recent life; and these claimed memories of former lives are important, not only as evidence offered for rebirth, but also conceptually, as fixing what is meant by the doctrine. One may or nay not find cases of this kind to be impressive, if they are offered as hard evidence for rebirth. Nevertheless, the fact that supposed recollections of former lives are pointed to as evidence does mark out a particular content for the idea of rebirth. Let me, therefore, formulate a reincarnation hypothesis on the basis of these instances of claimed memories of former lives” (*ibid*., p. 132).
9. *Ibid*., p. 133.
10. *Ibid*., p. 133.
11. *Ibid*.
12. Noel Q. King, *Religions of Africa: A Pilgrimage Into Traditional Religions* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1970) p. 81-82.
13. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 159-160.
14. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 135.

15. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 136-137.
16. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 139.
17. *Ibid*.
18. *Ibid*.
19. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit*., p. 85.
20. *Ibid*.
21. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit*., p. 85.
22. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 158.
23. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 158. This passage has also been cited earlier.
24. *Ibid*., p. 158.
25. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit*., p. 87.
26. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit*., p. 86.
27. J.G. Jennings, *The Vedantic Buddhism of the Buddha* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948).
28. *Ibid*., p. xlvii. Emphasis added.
29. *Ibid*., p. xxv. Emphasis added. Both passages as cited in Hick.
30. See Arvind Sharma, *The Philosophy of Religion: A Buddhist Perspective* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
31. John H. Hick, *op. cit*., p. 141.
32. John S. Mbiti, *op. cit*., p. 178.
33. Antonia Mills and Richard Slobodin, *Amerindian Rebirth: Reincarnation Belief Among North American Indians and Inuit* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1994) passim.
34. Jamake Highwater, *op. cit*., p. 81.
35. Geoffrey Parrinder, *op. cit*., p. 87.

CONCLUSION

1. See the following books by Professor Lawrence Eugene Sullivan, formerDirector of the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard University: *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's Religions* (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan, 1989); *Healing and Restoring: Health and Medicine in the World's Religions* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Center for the Study of World's Religions, 1989); *Icanchu's Drum: An Orientation to Meaning in South American Religions* (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan, 1988).

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